



A Brief Study on Contentment

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INTRODUCTION

What a great opportunity we have to assemble at this location to dedicate our precious time to the study of God's Word! Personally, it is a great joy for me to be able to stand before you to preach a portion of God's Word. As a Christian, I have a great responsibility to be thankful to you for being here (cf. 1 Thess 5:18). I also want to thank the elders of the Shenandoah congregation for supporting this great work you do with the annual lectureship. I also would like to thank my good Brother Gabriel Rodriguez for thinking about this unprofitable servant, and extending an invitation to be part of this year's lectureship program. It is my prayer that our heavenly Father will continue to bless this effort that brings so many blessings to those who attend. It is also my prayer that the things I will share with you today will bring great spiritual benefit to our lives.

I really appreciate the topic of **contentment** that has been assigned to me. This is one in which all of us need to take much time to consider what the Word of God teaches concerning it. We have many Christians today who are not content with the way they are living their lives. At the same time, we have faithful brethren who are satisfied with the way they live their lives in Christ. In this short lesson, I want to encourage all of us to learn to be content no matter what our physical or financial circumstances may be. I want us to consider the biblical teaching of contentment, which our Heavenly Father wants us to learn. Many problems can come our way if we do not learn to be content in life the way God expects us to be. Therefore, let us examine in our lesson the following two points: The **WHAT** of contentment and the **HOW** of contentment.

WHY THE SUBJECT OF CONTENTMENT IS AN IMPORTANT ONE TO STUDY

Why is the subject of Christian contentment an important one? Any topic we find in the Bible that has the ability of affecting our Christian lives is one of utmost importance. The subject of contentment is one of them. Whether we like it or not, this subject is a matter of life and death. Whatever our attitude is towards contentment will determine where you and I will spend eternity. For instance, if I do not follow the teaching of the Bible concerning this subject, I will find myself disobeying the will of God. My disobedience to God's will, can keep me away from entering Heaven some day (cf. Mt. 7:21-23; Heb 5:8-9). As we will consider later on in this lesson, a life of discontentment can affect my Christian living to the point that I no longer care for the spiritual things of God, but only those of this world.

THE "WHAT" OF CONTENTMENT

As we examine our first point, we must ask ourselves this question: What is contentment? A careful analysis of the term used in the Scriptures will help us to understand what this word really means. In order to understand what contentment is, we must go to those passages that make use of the word, and then, we must examine the word within its context. Also, we must

consider what Bible dictionaries have to say about it. According to W.E. Vine, the word contentment means: “to be sufficient, to be possessed of sufficient strength, to be strong, to be enough for a thing.” Vine goes on to add that this word, when it is used in the middle voice, it denotes the act of being satisfied, or contented with.

It is interesting to know that this word under consideration is found in several passages of Scripture in the New Testament. Let me encourage you to examine some of them with me. In the context of those who came to be baptized of John the baptizer, there were some soldiers who wanted to know what they could do to be right with God. Let us consider the answer John responded to them in Luke 3:14,

And soldiers also asked him, saying, and we, what must we do? And he said unto them, extort from no man by violence, neither accuse anyone wrongfully; **and be content with your wages** (Emphasis added).

John the baptizer utilizes this word in the sense of being satisfied with their wages. This also gives the idea of not complaining or murmuring about the amount of money they were being paid. This is exactly what you and I must do in order to accomplish contentment in our lives. We have several people today who are not happy with their wages. When this is the case, some of them proceed to complain and to use wrong attitude towards their bosses. When I used to work in the secular world my boss always gave me a raise without me having to ask for it. As a Christian, I always tried to be content with whatever paid I was getting. Obviously, this kind of attitude resulted in blessings that I was able to enjoy at that time. Some of my coworkers were always complaining about the money they were getting. They were never content with the amount given to them. *William Shakespeare* once said, “He is well paid, who is well satisfied.” This is something we can all learn from the pen of an uninspired writer (cf. 1 Thess 5:21).

When you are content, God will take care of you! Have you ever taken the time to examine the parable of the laborers in the vineyard of Mat 19:30-20:16? These men worked different hours for the same amount of money. When paying time came, the householder gave them the same amount of money. Those who worked more, complained about this. What was their problem? They were not content with the wages they received but, instead of being happy for the other ones who received the same amount, they murmured, and were discontent. I believe many today can relate to the problem of murmuring and not being satisfied with what they have. Let us be careful not to be guilty of the same mistake!

The other context in which we find the word contentment is found in 1 Tim. 6:7-8. Notice what the inspired Apostle Paul penned here,

For we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering **we shall be therewith content** (Emphasis added).

In this passage of Scripture we learn about the need of being satisfied with just having those things that are needed. When a Christian fails to realize what this passage teaches, then he or she will move to a life of discontentment. What this means is that they will complain all the time for the things they do not have. This is dangerous because for this kind of attitude, many have forsaken the Lord and His cause. When we are not satisfied with what we have, then we will work for the things we desire even to the point of breaking the Law of God. How many Christians today work so much that they even forsake the assembling of the saints, because they

have to be at work? Brethren, this is a big problem the church is facing today. Discontentment is keeping Christians away from doing God's will. It is imperative that we remember the words of the writer of Hebrews:

Be ye free from the love of money; **content with such things as ye have**: for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee (Heb. 13:5, emphasis added).

We, as Christians, must strive to be free from the love of money. We must give every effort not to fall into the sin of materialism. Don't get me wrong; I am not saying that being rich is wrong. You and I know that money is necessary for many things in life; nevertheless, when we love and put our emphasis on money only, we lose our sight of what our spiritual purpose in life is. We must take heed to the words the Apostle Paul wrote to the young evangelist Timothy,

But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Tim. 6:9-11).

Concerning our attitude towards money, I believe this is the best inspired advice you and I can have to make sure we are doing God's will. Brethren who have forgotten this advice have experienced what Paul refers to "having pierced themselves through with many sorrows." In other words, whoever follows the ways of the world with respect to this, will reap great spiritual loss.

The next key passage and context where contentment appears is one in which we see the Apostle Paul providing a great explanation of what contentment is. Let us examine for a few minutes the inspired words Paul penned to the saints at Philippi,

But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: **for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content**. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:10-13, emphasis added).

There are several things that we can glean from this passage of Scripture. First, we learn how the Apostle Paul had learned to be satisfied no matter what his surrounding circumstances were. In his explanation of this passage of Scripture, especially the word "content," Leslie G. Thomas, made the following observation:

The Greek word is autarkes, and its basic meaning is self-sufficiency. The individual who possesses this trait of character has the resources which makes help from others unnecessary, or, which is the same thing, he is independent of external circumstances. Or, to be a little more explicit, the term "content," as used

here by the apostle Paul, implies a state of mind in which one is appeased to the point where he is not disquieted or disturbed by a desire for that which he does not have, however much he might need or like to have it (Thomas 148-49).

From other Scriptures we learn that Paul had gone through a lot of difficult times. In 2 Corinthians 11, we read how the Apostle Paul suffered many things for the cause of Christ. In the list of difficulties, he also mentions the fact that he had experienced times of hunger and thirst (v. 27). There were times when Paul had nothing to eat or drink. Even in the midst of these difficult times, Paul had learned to be content in whatever state he was. There may be times when we as Christians suffer for the cause of Christ, lose our material possessions (cars, houses, clothes), lose our jobs, or have nothing to eat. But, no matter what our circumstances may be, God always provides for His children. He provided for Paul, and He will certainly do the same with us! I am reminded of a story where a Christian family went on vacation for a few days. After they came back, they found someone had broken into their home and stolen every valuable possession they had. The mother had a business of sewing and making clothes for a company. Well, according to the story, those who broke into their apartment stole every sewing machine they owned. They also took all the jewelry they had stored in their closet. This was a difficult time for this family. Whatever money the father brought to the house was not sufficient for a family of seven. There was crying and desperation in the midst of this difficult time. According to the narrative, as the family gathered together in the living room, the father stood up and quoted the words of Job,

Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah (Job 1:21).

After he said these words, the father went to God in prayer, along with the entire family, and, as far as I know, the family was able to carry on with their lives. They accepted their circumstance, and allowed God to assist them through His providence. Friends, God did not forsake them, but through His providence, He made sure they had those things needed to survive. Brethren, this is the God that we serve when we are content with what we have! Remember, He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5; Mat. 28:20; Psa. 55:22; Phil. 4:6; Psa. 121:1-2).

Even though the Apostle Paul suffered many things in life, one thing we can learn from him is that he was a happy person no matter what his difficult situation may have been. Writing to the saints at Rome, Paul said,

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward (Rom. 8:18).

Friends, we must keep our eyes on heaven, and not on the things of this earth. Let us remember the words of Paul, which he wrote to the saints at Colossae,

If then ye were raised together with Christ, **seek the things that are above**, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. **Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth**; For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory (Col. 3:1-4, Emphasis added).

Now that we are in Christ, we must focus on spiritual things, and not the ones of this world. If we focus on the things of the world, we will never learn to be content, but will live a life of discontentment. One example of a Christian who failed to set his mind on heavenly things was Demas. This Christian failed to apply the principle of contentment in his life, and for this mistake, he ended up forsaking the Lord, the Apostle Paul, and not only that, but he also loved this present world, practicing something the Lord hates (2 Tim. 4:10; James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). We will end up doing the same, if we forget to set our minds on things above. Friends, we may lose our salvation if we are not careful to learn from the mistakes of others.

Having considered what contentment is, let me take a few minutes to explain what contentment is not from a different perspective. I believe this is important due to the fact that we have many Christians practicing contentment in a negative way.

WHAT CONTENTMENT IS NOT

Let us remember once again what W.E. Vine defined as contentment: to be sufficient, to be possessed of sufficient strength, to be strong, to be enough for a thing. If we are not careful, the practical aspect of this definition may be applied incorrectly. A person may argue that he or she is sufficient for a thing to the point in which such persons believe that they do not need God at all. You and I know that such people do exist in this world. They are so deceived with their riches that they have come to a spiritual state in which they believe they don't need anything or anyone to help them get to heaven. For the most part, this may be the case with non-Christian people; nevertheless, we also have some Christians who have adopted this kind of mentality that when they are blessed with some wealth, they tend to forget about God, and the great things He has done for us. We need to be very careful that we do not fall into this sinful thinking. Let us remember the words of the Apostle Paul, who writing to the Corinthian Brethren, said,

And such confidence have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:4-5).

We would also do well to remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in the context of the True Vine, said,

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: **for apart from me ye can do nothing** (John 15:5, Emphasis added).

These passages are very strong to convey the idea that we need God at all times. Personally, in the past, I have been guilty of transgressing the Law of God. For instance, when I had enough money in the bank, there were times when I did not think about God, as I should have. But, when the money was gone, then I remembered that I turned to God in prayer to ask Him to help me in times of need. You and I know that such attitude is not the one that pleases our Heavenly Father. As a Christian grows spiritually, he or she learns the value of thanking God for everything no matter what his financial status may be (cf. Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18). We must

do this whenever we are in need, as well as when we have everything we need. God must be thanked, honored and remember at all times!

Interestingly, we must also remember that contentment is not being satisfied with whatever spiritual state you find yourself in at this time. I have heard some Christians argue that they would not care to grow more in the knowledge of God's Word as we are commanded to do, just because they already know some (cf. 2 Pet. 3:18). They argued that they are happy in whatever spiritual state they are in. They are content with just knowing a little of God's Word. Friends, this is not what the Bible teaches. The Word of God puts a great emphasis upon the need to grow spiritually at all times. Passages such as 2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:15, 2 Pet. 1:5-11, and others exhort us to give the more diligence to the spiritual growth that God desires from all of us. We cannot be content with knowing just a little bit of God's Word. We must emphasize spiritual growth at all times. There are joys and blessings in knowing more and more of God's Holy Word! (Jeremiah 15:16; Hosea 4:6). Therefore, let us not be content with whatever spiritual state we are in, but let us move into perfection and give God the honor he deserves through a life of faithfulness to His Word. Having considered what contentment is not; now let me explain the practical aspect of this lesson: the HOW of contentment. Let us learn what you and I can do to experience a life of contentment in Christ.

THE "HOW" OF CONTENTMENT

How can we as Christian develop an attitude of contentment? What are some of the principles we must have in mind in order to accomplish contentment in our lives? Let me suggest a few things we can do to achieve a life of contentment, which will please our Heavenly Father.

We Must Learn To Trust In God's Providence

The Bible teaches that God will provide for His people. We have already examined passages such as Hebrew 13:5; Matthew 28:20, and others where we learn that God will never leave us alone, nor forsake us. We must learn to be content in whatever situation we may find ourselves in. Trusting in the providence of God will help us to not live a life of discontentment. We must have faith in the promises of God. You and I can see throughout the Bible how God always took care of His people. He will also do the same with us if we keep His commandments and trust in His promises. Let us remember the words of Paul as he wrote to the saints at Philippi, "And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). We would also do well to remember the words of Jesus Christ, as He explained this very point in His great Sermon on the Mount,

Therefore I say unto you, be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment? Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth do clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much

more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, what shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat 6:25-33).

We Must Learn To Be Happy Even When We Do Not Have Those Things We Desire

As we have considered in this lesson, the Apostle Paul learned to live a life of contentment, even when things did not go well. Notice again the words of Philippians 4:11, “Not that I speak in respect of want; for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content.” This is exactly what you and I need to do. We must learn to be happy, even when we do not have those things we wish we had. There will be many times when we will not be able to have those things we desire. When this is the case, we must learn to be happy no matter what. Let us remember that Paul was in prison at the time he wrote the letter of Philippians. Even from prison, he says, “Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, rejoice” (Phil 4:4). In this passage we see Paul’s happiness even in prison. Brethren, we need to learn to live this kind of life! If you have noticed, I have repeated the word “learn” many times. Friends, a life of contentment is something we **learn**, and not something we receive at birth. Let us notice what Brother Robert Taylor Jr. commented on the text of Philippians 4:11-12,

Being in personal need did not prompt this apostolic statement. Paul was not complainer. Grumbling over personal deprivations within his own life was not the Pauline approach to his lifestyle. He had learned self-mastery. He had pursued and attained a contented spirit, that very virtue which is so evasive to so many of us. **Note that it was not a gift to Paul at birth; it was not a miraculous gift conferred when he received the Holy Spirit baptism with accompanying apostolic powers. It was a learned or mastered virtue. It did not come in a moment, an hour, a day, a week, a month, or even in a year.** He had been developing this unique and rarely attained virtue for a lifetime. Contentment was his with little or with much. He knew how to be put down; he knew how to abound. Everywhere and in all things he was instructed (initiated) into the evasive mystery of true contentment. He employed the imagery of ancient people who were initiated into the mystery of some movement. Those outside it did not have the instruction. Paul was content with a full stomach or an empty one; he knew how to abound with a degree of affluence; he knew how to suffer need in periods of human deprivation (Taylor, 163-64, emphasis added).

Learning contentment requires an effort from our part. Any faithful Christian who desires to live a life of contentment must strive to master this kind of virtue; otherwise, he or she will never experience it. In view of this, Brother Wendell Winkler adds the following comment to the attitude Paul had while being content,

Paul had learned that contentment and happiness are not dependent on external circumstances, but on inner qualities of the heart, and upon a right relationship with the Lord” (Winkler, 38).

Brethren, we must strive to have a right relationship with God, since this will help us to be content every day no matter what comes our way!

We Must Learn Not To Follow The Ways Of The World

Christians must remember that we live in the world, but we are not of the world. This means that we must keep ourselves away from imitating the way the people of the world live. We must then, take heed to the inspired words the Apostle John penned in 1 John 2:15-17,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

Certainly, we will also do well to follow the inspired advice Paul gave to the saints at Rome,

And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, and ye may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2).

Most people in the world are not happy with the material possessions they have in life. Most of the time they complain about those things they are not able to have. It is said that many years ago, John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men of his day, and who had a net worth of \$100 million, was once asked, “How much wealth does it take to be happy?” He answered, “Another million dollars.” Friends, this is the way people who are not in Christ live. Christians do not live this kind of life! Faithful Christians do not follow the ways of the world, but the will of God. This is what keeps us happy with the things we have in this life!

We Must Learn That Material Possessions Will Come To An End Some Day

There is no single passage in the entire Bible that teaches that our material possessions will go into eternity with us. This is something we must learn now, if we want to live a life of contentment. Let us remember the words of Paul,

For we brought nothing into this world, for neither can we carry anything out; but having food and covering we shall be therewith content” (1 Tim 6:7-8, emphasis added).

Remember, everything will be destroyed at the second coming of Christ (cf. 2 Pet 3:9-13). Just think about this: what will happen to your \$50,000 bank account if Christ was to come today? Will you be able to take this money with you? The answer to this last question is an emphatic NO! Therefore, we must focus on spiritual things, instead of the things of this world. We, as faithful Christians, must practice the wise advice Christ gives us in the Sermon on the Mount,

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in

heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also” (Matt 6:19-20).

We Must Ask God To Keep Us Away From A Life Of Discontentment

We are instructed to pray to God at all times (cf. 1 Thess 5:17; Col 4:2; Rom 12:12). In our prayers, we must ask God to keep us away from living a life of discontentment. Please remember the words of the model prayer Jesus taught in Matthew 6:13, “And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” We must ask God to deliver us from the sin of discontentment. Every faithful Christian needs to carefully consider the words found in Proverbs 30:7-9,

Two things have I asked of thee; Deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lies; Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is needful for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is Jehovah? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and use profanely the name of my God.

Let me encourage everyone to utter these words in our daily prayers! I can assure you that directing a prayer to God in this manner will help you to enjoy a life of contentment.

We Must Remember The Terrible Consequences Of Living A Life Of Discontentment

We have several parables in the New Testament that speak about the terrible consequences of trying to live a life of discontentment. For example, the foolish rich man of Luke 12:13-21 teaches us about the eternal consequences of putting our eyes on the material things of this world to the point of completely forgetting about God. Friends, a life of discontentment will take you this far! We also have the parable of the rich man ruler, who, after being told what he needed to do to inherit eternal life, he chose his material possessions instead of the will of God (cf. Mark 10:17-31). Sadly to say, many Christians today are imitating these kind of examples, where they actually choose material possessions, instead of God’s will. We must stay away from this kind of life!

CONCLUSION

As I bring this lesson to an end, we must remember that the information we have examined thus far, can help us to understand what the Holy Scriptures teach concerning the subject of Christian contentment. Let me encourage all of us to dedicate much time to the study of this great subject. I can assure you, it will change your life for the better! You will be a faithful and mature Christian who always trusts in God’s providence.

After reading this lesson, let me invite you to read the words of James, who wrote, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves” (James 1:22). If we practice what the Bible teaches, then we will do those things God expects us to do, and, at the same time, God will bless us (cf. James 1:25). A life of contentment will help us to grow spiritually; will help us to be happy Christians no matter what comes our way, and, will also help us to make it to Heaven! May God bless us to that end!

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