

CONTENT & DISCONTENT: A GREAT PARADOX

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INTRODUCTION: (SCRIPTURE READING: PHILIPPIANS 4:8-13)

- A. In our world, the circle of life in which we live, contentment stands as a fascinating and great paradox:**
1. For instance, companies advertise with great success the words, "Satisfaction Guaranteed!"
 - a. Somehow, with those words people find the confidence to purchase an item they'd not normally get... Especially if the words are tacked on to a late night infomercial item such as "Facial Flex" - Who needs that? Suddenly you can't live without it!
 - b. Satisfaction Guaranteed – Really! Well, for many companies their real goal is not truly satisfied and content customers... They want you always wanting something more!
 - c. Even before you even get their product out of the store, in the mail, or off the dealership lot the company has been fast at work designing or even producing the next great thing which you will certainly not be able to survive without. It's a continuous cycle!
 2. We know that there is always going to be something newer, something faster, something better, something bigger, something more efficient, something stronger, or something brighter
 3. We know it and they know it. This is a great paradox of satisfaction that is both good and bad:
 - a. It's good because the desire to always have more and get better drives the technological advancements and medical breakthroughs which make life so much better.
 - b. But it's also bad because the same desire to always have more also drives us to strive to keep up with the Jones' – But in this case the Jones' aren't a neighbor or a friend but an idea... A desire for more and more that causes many to drown in financial debt!
- B. Spiritually speaking contentment is also a great paradox – As we look to God's word there are many instructions that tell us to be content and others that tell us to never be content!**
1. One of the great struggles we face is the tendency to be content in the areas where we should be discontent and the tendency to be discontent in the areas where we should be content
 2. Paul, in emphasizing the role of contentment in his own life, spoke about how it is something he had to learn, but learning contentment in Christ brought him through his difficult circumstances as well as his joyous circumstances! **(Philippians 4:12-13)**
 3. So let's take a look at this paradox from a Biblical perspective and recommit ourselves placing both contentment and discontentment where they really belong!

I. AREAS WHERE WE NEED TO LEARN TO BE MORE CONTENT:

- A. One place where it can be difficult to learn contentment is the amount of our wealth & possessions:**
1. This appears to be the context of Paul's often quoted words on contentment: He said, "I have learned, in whatever state I am in, to be content!" **(Philippians 4:10-14)**
 - a. Paul had seen it all! He saw multitudes obey his preaching of the gospel & he saw people casting stones upon him... He been through all the highs & lows of preaching – Not only in people's responses, but also in his own physical state. This taught him much!
 - b. His experiences of trials & triumphs with the example of Christ taught him to be content
 - c. Did Paul look forward to the low moments of his life? Certainly not! But he had learned, no matter what his outside circumstances were, to be content & rejoice in Christ!
 - d. Contentment for Paul did not rest in possessions or circumstances, but in Christ!
 - e. The secrets to Paul contentment: He knew he knew the Lord, he rejoiced in the Lord, he trusted in the Lord for the strength he needed, he kept gratitude in the Lord alive!

2. Paul later wrote to Timothy and instructed him to warn his brethren about the dangers of placing too much of their focus and desires in material things **(1 Timothy 6:6-11)**
 - a. Where is great gain in this life? Pursuing godliness with contentment! Trying to find contentment in itself won't enough to quench our internal hungers and thirsts. It's when contentment is found in an authentic walk with God that we find fulfillment!
 - b. Getting caught up in the pursuit stuff proves to be vanity... If we can take with us when die, why do we live like it's all life is about? The thirst for wealth is insatiable... you always want more, but those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled!
 - c. Notice what Paul says we should learn contentment with – Food and clothing! These are some of the most basic needs of life. If you and I were reduced to just our very basic necessities are we still able to find contentment? Consider how Job responded...
 - d. Those who get caught up in materialism are destined for added temptations, ruin, destruction, and evils – It's a result of never being content, always having to have more!
 - 1) Two illustrations are used: An animal caught in a trap and a man that is drowning
 - 2) How many otherwise good men do we know who have sacrificed their family, their own spirituality, or their morality on the altar of "a better life"
 - 3) It's hard enough to do what is right & be spiritually minded as it is, but if we aren't being content we are just handing arrows to the devil for him to shoot at us!
3. The discontent thirst for material things is like a leech whose appetite is never satisfied. Enough is never enough! When will we reach a point where we can say enough? **(Proverbs 30:15)**
4. How do we learn to be content when it comes to the wealth and possessions that seem so attractive all around us? Make Heaven our focus & the place of our treasures! **(1 Tim 6:19)**

B. Contentment also has to be learned when it comes to our relationships with others one earth:

1. It's hard for a single person to be a "whatever state I am in" type of person, especially with the added pressures of dating, friends, and expectations from others **(Phil 4:11; 1 Cor 7:6-9, 26-28)**
 - a. There are some single people who find their identity & fulfillment in having someone...
They aren't happy and they aren't content unless they have a boyfriend or girlfriend
 - b. For a person who wants to get married, they have to be looking for someone to date, this is how our culture works, but to tie up one's contentment in it is another thing
 - c. What if God's will for you is to be single... Can you accept that? Our identity, our purpose, our fulfillment has got to be placed in something greater than a relationship!
2. One of the most difficult situations to be content in can be when you find yourself on the wrong side of an unscriptural divorce – especially if you are relatively young: **(Matt 19:9; Luke 16:18)**
 - a. Difficult cases: Person un-scripturally divorced before learning the truth, spouse put them away for wrong reason, person who divorced for wrong reason & later repents
 - b. Someone once asked me, "What do you say to a person in that situation?" My response? You say to them EXACTLY what Jesus said! He knew there'd be tough circumstances, but He gave this commandment anyway because it is what is right... We can't alter it!
 - c. Some say, "But it's my right to be happy!" Well, it's our right to choose whether we want to obey God or not too! Is a few years of POTENTIAL happiness worth your soul?
3. Those who are married need to pursue contentment with their own marriages: **(Prov 5:19-20)**
 - a. Just as some single people are constantly wishing they were married, there are some married people who wish they were single... Just having a relationship isn't the key!

- b. Dissatisfaction is a driving force in divorce and adultery! Maybe at first things aren't going as you'd like at home, at work or at the gym you meet someone who shows interest in you and our needs, then your dissatisfaction in your marriage grows – Discontent!
- c. Some are filled with strife because one or both of the spouses are never content... Selfish desires and selfish ambitions exist because we don't get what we want! **(James 4:1)**
- 4. Finally, there are times we have to learn to be content when our relationships with others may be strained... when we have real enemies in spite of pursuing peace **(Romans 12:17-21)**
 - a. We have the responsibility to seek peace & pursue it... To respond to those who mistreat us and those who are our enemies with goodness instead of retaliating with evil
 - b. But peace takes two people. We can't make people be peaceful! Some just won't have it!
 - c. So what do we do if someone insists on being our enemies or won't allow peace to take place? We press forward, content, knowing we've done as Christ commanded!

C. While we don't think about this often, we need to learn contentment in our assurance of our salvation

- 1. Even though Christians should be the very people who have the most confidence and hope and are contented in that, it seems that we are sometimes filled with more doubt & uncertainty:
 - a. Phrases: "If I make it to Heaven" or "Maybe one day I'll get to enter Heaven" or "I think I am saved" or "I hope of the judgment day, there's not something I've forgotten!"
 - b. These are not phrases of hope, confidence, and faith! They are not the type of phrases Bible uses to describe the certainty of our own salvation – So why do we use them?
 - c. It's odd how we are confident that we know the truth and I firmly believe that what we teach and practice is right; however we sometimes act like the ones with the least amount of hope! Knowledge and following more should bring stronger hope!
- 2. Faith and an appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ should build within us a strong confidence and contentment in the hope we have of eternal life! **(Romans 5:1-6)**
 - a. Notice how the foundation of our hope is the sacrifice of Jesus and our being justified by faith. Our hope does not rest in how good we are, our ability to live sinless lives, or the great things we do for God. If these were the foundation, we'd have no hope!
 - b. Hope would be hard for a Jew seeking justification by law keeping, but we seek it by faith and the blood of Christ. If we think like that Jew, it's no surprise we aren't content!
 - c. These are words of certainty – We have peace with God, so we should be at peace within ourselves! Since we have access by faith into this grace we can know we stand!
 - d. Hope neither causes us to be ashamed or frustrated... Truly believing and appreciating that "God so loved the world" will cause us to be full of hope & give reason to rejoice!
- 3. When John wrote his first epistle he was clear that the purpose behind his letter was so that our joy may be full and we may know we have eternal life **(1 John 1:4; 5:13)**
 - a. At the start and at the end of this epistle John tells us why he wrote it... That we may KNOW... It's was written to give confidence of our salvation & fellowship with God
 - b. Throughout this epistle John gives us several tests of our fellowship – **(Give List On PPT)**
 - c. But John reminds us from the start that our confidence is not about passing these tests with sinless perfection. Where we fall short the blood of Christ cleanses us! If we have the blood of Christ & are striving to walk in the light we can KNOW **(1:7; 2:1-3)**
- 4. Why is it important that we learn to be content when it comes to our hope and confidence of our salvation? Because this assurance is necessary for our endurance! **(Hebrews 10:35-36)**

II. AREAS WHERE WE NEED TO LEARN TO BE MORE DISCONTENT

Last week we talked about the need to be content and how the scriptures emphasized contentment in many places. But remember, it is a paradox. While the Bible stresses our need to be content it also warns against the dangers of contentment. While we need to learn to be content in the areas where we should be content, we must also learn to be discontent in the areas where we should be discontent!

A. When it comes to our personal spiritual growth, we must guard against growing content:

1. We must fight the tendency to grow complacent in our battles against sin... Especially those sins which are more internal than external: **(1 John 3:2-6)**
 - a. It's easy to look at the past & see our progress, to see the sins of our past which no longer have power over us, & grow complacent with the sins & shortcomings of our present
 - b. We can't grow content with ANY sin in our lives because of our HOPE! This hope and this knowledge ought to keep me uncomfortable with any sinful impurities in my life!
 - c. Anyone who harbors any kind of sin, continuing in it, is not living with an awareness of Christ's return. If we want to abide in Christ, sin certainly cannot abide in us!
2. We must not be content in our knowledge of God's word either **(Heb 5:11-6:2; 1 Peter 2:2)**
 - a. Paul had many things he wanted to say to them, but he couldn't. It wasn't because it was too technical, but their lack of growth in knowledge squashed their understanding!
 - b. There's a point when it's okay for a person to be "unskilled in the word" because he is a "child" in the faith. That is supposed to be temporary – something we grow out of!
 - c. There is a tendency to look at Bible study as if it were something of our youth... you know, back when we were younger and had Bible lessons to do, had memory verses to memorize, and were held accountable to it by our parents. Now we're adults, right?
 - d. While we are supposed to be progressing from milk to meat, growing in our understanding of the scriptures, our desire for it should stay like the desire a baby has for its milk!
3. Knowledge alone of course is not our goal, but knowledge that strengthens our faith. We should never be satisfied but always pushing to grow abundantly in our faith **(2 Thess 1:3-5)**
4. Another major part of our spiritual growth is becoming like Christ. Here too we must be stirred up to always be striving for Christ to be formed in us **(Gal 4:19; Col 1:27)**
5. A great example of a person refusing to be content in their spiritual growth is Paul **(Phil 2:12-16)**
6. Here's where each one of us has to take a personal spiritual inventory – Humble self examination must be done on a regular basis to reveal the areas where we need to grow **(James 1:22-25)**
 - a. We can't compare ourselves to other Christians and we certainly shouldn't compare ourselves to those of the world! We are comparing our "image" to the "image" of Christ and the word of God serves as the mirror that we are to use for examination
 - b. With a pen or pencil & paper, write down some specific areas where you need to grow... Next to each area write some practical things you can do to accomplish that growth.
 - c. Now, if you are complacent and content you'll do nothing about these areas; however, if you are discontent & you truly want to grow you will take the needed action to grow

B. Also when it comes to the growth of the local church, we cannot allow contentment to creep in:

1. One of the greatest problems local churches face is growing spiritually stagnant **(Rev. 3:15-16)**
 - a. Have you ever been around water that was really stagnant? Water that had been there a long time & maybe had some things decaying in it? Stinks! Stagnant water isn't just bad because it's not moving, but it's not good for anything but growing mosquitoes

- b. This is the nature of Luke-Warm churches! I doubt we fully appreciate just how repulsive Jesus sees stagnancy in a church. It's NOT okay to just maintain status quo as church
- c. When we start feeling comfortable where we are at, when we start to lose the drive to excel as a church... we start to become stagnant, we start to quit pleasing the Lord, and we start dying as a church! We have to keep that feeling of discontentment!
- 2. Both individual & collective spiritual maturation must be our constant goal **(Eph 4:11-16)**
 - a. Growing churches are full of discontent members personally pushing for growth! We can't expect to grow as long as only a few of members want it bad enough to take action!
 - b. We are to be striving toward unity of faith, knowledge of the Son of God, maturity, the fullness of Christ, strength against false doctrines, closeness to Christ, and love
 - c. What's the secret to getting it to grow? It's not found in extra programs or high pressure sales tactics ... It comes when every part does its share – That's you... that's me!
- 3. Paul encouraged the members of the church at Corinth to "strive to excel in building up the church" instead of getting caught up in who has what spiritual gift **(1 Cor 14:4, 12)**
- 4. There are some specific things that I see we should work on together as a local church... These are areas where some complacency has set in and we need our fires rekindled:
 - a. More members who are willing to teach or develop the ability to teach, inviting more people to services, members getting together apart from the services, men who develop more talents, trying to teach people the gospel (home Bible studies), bring up our contribution, looking for more ways to serve, build community relationships, visit those who are sick, better support Bible classes, to do good works, etc
 - b. **Illustration:** Poem about Anybody, Everybody, Somebody, & Nobody. Which are you?

C. We should guard against growing content with the struggles and sufferings of those around us:

- 1. One of the reasons for the downfall of the Jews during Old Testament times was their lackadaisical attitude toward and even mistreatment of those who were in need **(Micah 6:8)**
 - a. Why did God punish the Jews by sending them into captivity? Most of the time we think of idolatry, right? This was certainly a main reason, but it was not the only reason! Especially in the minor prophets their lack of justice, mercy, & love is condemned!
 - b. In fact, Micah boiled down God's expectations of man to three things... Two of three speak of reaching out to those in need – Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God!
 - c. Amos said God despised their religious acts because they were not practicing justice and righteousness **(Amos 5:24)** – They'd settled into a comfort zone **(Amos 6:1, 4)**
 - d. Many atrocities were taking place (examples) – Some were guilty of doing these things and others were guilty of sitting idly by while it happened!
- 2. Often, when we grow content, we no longer have that inward disturbed feeling which motivates us to action. This is especially true when it comes to how we respond to those hurting around us:
 - a. James points out how those who are orphans and widows are in a state of affliction... It's our sense of their "pressures" which motivates us to care for their needs **(Jas 1:27)**
 - b. John emphasizes that love is an active force **(1 John 3:17-18)** – Our response is the result of "seeing" their need. How could a person NOT love in deed and truth? They've "closed up their bowels of compassion" (KJV) – Don't feel the hurt of their brother!
 - c. **Illustration:** Show pictures of people in need – How does that make you feel? This is why fund raising shows use images like these – They know it stirs up people's compassion and mercy to the point of giving money. What does it say if we aren't affected by it?

3. Our compassion for others must be kept alive, causing us to get involved and help **(Luke 10:33-37)**
 - a. Many times in the gospels Jesus is spoken of as having “seen” people – This usually refers to Him taking notice of their difficult circumstances, being filled with compassion for them, and He usually responds by taking some action **(John 11:33; Luke 7:13)**
 - b. It takes caring enough to feel their pain and get involved! It takes being willing to sacrifice personal time, money, and convenience. But it is about being more like Christ!
 - c. This is a powerful force for evangelism. Others are brought to glorify God because of this... others see our faith in action and words gain power... It opens doors of opportunity!
4. We must never be content with the spiritual problems and the lost state of others. We must keep alive our feelings of compassion which motivate us to seek their salvation! **(Mark 6:34)**

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