

CONTENTMENT vs. COVETOUSNESS

CONTENTMENT IS REALIZING THAT GOD HAS ALREADY PROVIDED EVERYTHING I NEED FOR MY PRESENT AND FUTURE HAPPINESS

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

DEFINITION OF CONTENTMENT

In Hebrew, the word *ya'al* means “to show willingness; to undertake; to agree to or accept.” This word is used to describe a person who is resolved to do something or let something be, such as the Levite who agreed to dwell with Micah. “Micah said unto him, Dwell with me... And the Levite was content to dwell with the man” (Judges 17:10-11).

In the New Testament, the words content and contentment are translated from *arkeo*, which mean “to be satisfied; to be strong,” and *autarkeia*, which means “to need no aid or support; sufficiency of the necessities of life.”

Contentment comes as we realize that God is all we really need and He will never leave us. We can be satisfied in Him, knowing that He is the Supplier of all our physical and spiritual needs. “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,’” (Hebrews 13:5, New International Version).

CONTENTMENT IS CONTRARY TO HUMAN NATURE AND MUST BE LEARNED

We long for a better environment in which to live, assuming that with it we will achieve contentment. Yet Adam and Eve had the perfect environment, and they were not content in it. They had perfect health, a perfect marriage, a perfect garden, and daily fellowship with God Himself, yet they soon believed the lie that God had not provided everything they needed for their present and future happiness.

If Adam and Eve were not content in the Garden of Eden, what hope is there for the rest of us, apart from the spiritual insight that comes from God? May we, with Paul, be able to say, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,” (Philippians 4:11, New International Version).

CONTENTMENT BEGINS BY KNOWING THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

“The chief end of man is to know God and to enjoy him forever” (Westminster Shorter Catechism). Man was created with a God-sized vacuum, and He is the only One Who can fill that void. The Apostle Paul’s ultimate aim was to “know him (Christ), and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).

CONTENTMENT REQUIRES DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN NEEDS AND WANTS

There are few things in life that are really necessary. In fact, God identified just two: food and clothing. “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (I Timothy 6:8). If we are not content with the basics of food and clothing, we will never be content, no matter how many things we obtain.

God promised to provide for our needs; however, He has not assured us that we will get all our wants. We have a tendency to spend our resources on wants and then worry about our needs. Jesus warned about such concern. "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' "For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you," (Matthew 6:31-33, New American Standard).

CONTENTMENT IS BASED ON A RECOGNITION OF MUTUAL NEED

One of the great mysteries and wonders of life is that God has a need for each one of us. He desires our fellowship, and He needs our bodies to be the temple of His Holy Spirit. He needs the members of our bodies to be the instruments of righteousness to do His will, because He chooses to work through believers.

In return, God created us to have a daily need for Him. He did not create us to survive on one meal a month but on daily food, and He taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). He also pointed out that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

DISCONTENTMENT BEGINS BY DESIRING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

When either partner in a marriage becomes self-sufficient, the love relationship is damaged, because joy and grace come from giving and receiving. The temptation of Adam and Eve was not simply to taste some forbidden fruit but to be self-sufficient and no longer need God. The subtle serpent told them that if they are the fruit, they would "be as gods" and be able to decide for themselves good and evil (see Genesis 3:1-6).

DISCONTENTMENT LEADS TO COVETOUSNESS

When a brother complained about not receiving his fair share of an inheritance, Jesus said, "Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions," (Luke 12:15, New American Standard).

COVETOUSNESS PRODUCES IDOLATRY

If we desire what God has not given to us but what He has given to others, we are guilty of coveting. This is a violation of the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17).

When we expect from possessions or people what only God can give, we turn them into idols and become guilty of idolatry. For example, if we expect security from money, we make money an idol, because only God can give security. Likewise, if we expect fulfillment from wealth or expensive possessions, we make them idol. The same is true if we look to food or diets alone for health.

CONTENTMENT IS ACHIEVED BY EXCHANGING THINGS FOR MORE OF CHRIST

Someone has wisely observed that Jesus is all we need, but we will not know it until He is all we have. Paul understood this truth by exchanging things for more of Christ. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:8).

In one sense, life is a continual exchange. We exchange time on the job for money. We then exchange money for food, and we exchange food for strength. A wise person will exchange things of lesser value for things of greater value. Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool. who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

CONTENTMENT ALLOWS US TO GAIN THINGS OF GREATER VALUE

Contentment is setting our affections on eternal treasure rather than on temporal possessions. It is experiencing the qualities of Godliness without the distraction of earthly cares. Jesus warned about the conflict between temporal things and eternal riches when He spoke of the seed falling into different types of soil: “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

HOW CONTENT ARE YOU?

1. In what specific ways do you enjoy the presence of the Lord?
2. How much time do you spend enjoying your family?
3. Are you making practical use of the possessions that have been entrusted to you?
4. Have you set your affections on getting things that you think will make your life happier?
5. Do you grieve or become bitter when your possessions are damaged or stolen?
6. When damage comes to your life, possessions, or family, do you have the response of Job? “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).
7. Do you rejoice in the wealth of things that money cannot buy—such as health, freedom, a good name, a clear conscience, and eternal salvation—more than temporal possessions?
8. Do you believe that God has given you all you need?