

Discontentment in Marriage
Philippians 4:11-13; Hebrews 13:5-6
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As we have announced with much joy the marriage this coming week of two from our very midst, I believe it would be beneficial for us all to take some time this Lord's Day and next Lord's Day to reflect on two sins that can do great damage in our marriages (and their spiritual remedies). This Lord's Day I would like to address the subject of discontentment in marriage (and its biblical remedy). Discontentment in marriage leads to looking for greener grass elsewhere (it begins by imagining how much better your marriage would be with ____, then looking and acting it out).

Beloved, whatever attacks your contentment in Christ will likely lead to discontentment in other areas of your life (like your marriage). It is not sinful to want to see biblical changes in your marriage or in your spouse (that's good), but let those changes begin in your own life and do not rest your contentment upon some change in your spouse so that you forsake your contentment in Christ until he/she changes. Discontentment arises when change does not come as you want it or as soon as you want it. Discontentment is chiefly not a marriage problem, but rather a spiritual problem in your relationship with Jesus. You're not content in Him.

Dear Christian, you are not helplessly given over to discontentment because of the change you desire to see in your husband or wife. Will you choose by God's grace to learn contentment in whatever state your marriage may be, or will you sinfully choose to be swallowed up with discontentment as you face sorrow, heartache, or great trial in your present circumstances? The joy of contentment or the misery of discontentment is a door before you. Which door will you walk through?

The main points from our text are these: (1) Contentment in All Circumstances Is Learned (Philippians 4:11-12); and (2) Contentment in All Circumstances Is Realized through Faith Not Sight (Philippians 4:13).

I. Contentment in All Circumstances Is Learned (Philippians 4:11-12).

A. Paul wrote this letter while in bonds under arrest in Rome (Philippians 1:7,13,14,16). He had committed no crime, but rather was arrested for his faithfulness in standing for Jesus Christ and His truth, regardless of the cost to himself. Even while Paul was suffering in bonds for Christ, fellow Christians (even ministers) were adding to His affliction by way of their contentious accusations against Him (Philippians 1:14-16).

1. And yet despite the fact that Paul in his ministry had been stoned and left for dead, whipped with the painful Roman lash upon his bare back, bound with chains in a cold damp prison, maligned and lied about, and deserted by friends in his time of isolation, this letter is filled with constant expressions of joy, contentment, and thanksgiving (15 times a form of the Greek word for joy, *chará*, is used).

2. Paul rejoiced not that he suffered for suffering's sake, but that he could see by faith the love of Christ, the power of Christ, and the wisdom of Christ in all that he suffered.

B. As Paul now draws this inspired letter to a close, he does not want the emphasis to be upon his suffering, but rather he desires all attention to be focused upon the sufficiency of Christ in whatever he faces. He is not complaining about his trials, but rather is encouraging his fellow Christians to learn contentment that their joy in Christ might be full. He could have given many reasons why he should not be in prison, but there he was by God's appointment. He could have complained about the food or the treatment he received from the soldiers. But rather than complaining about the adversities he faced, he was content to be there knowing that Jesus had ordained it for God's glory and his good.

C. Paul wanted his dear brethren to know this undeniable truth: Contentment in all circumstances can be learned (Philippians 4:11-12).

1. Contentment is not founded upon that which is subject to change like everything in us and around us is, but rather is founded upon Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

2. There is always something that we don't have that we believe will make us happy and content once we have it. Either we are discontent because we cannot get what we want in life (or in our marriages), or if we get what we want, the novelty wears off and we want more of the same or something else—never satisfied. Or we live in fear of losing that which we have.

3. True contentment is to rest in the all-sufficiency of Jesus regardless of your need. It is not to be without emotion (like a stone that feels nothing), or to be indifferent about biblical changes that are needed in your marriage. It is to rest in the comfort and hope that Jesus who loves you with an everlasting and unchangeable love can do you no wrong and is working all adversities for your good (Romans 8:28). It is to know you cannot change your spouse, but God can. Your duty is to be a loving and godly husband or wife and to pray for him/her (1 Peter 3:1-4).

4. Dear ones, what would make you content in this life? What would you place in the blank: "If I only had _____, I would be content in this world." What would finally put an end to all your discontentment, complaining, self-pity, and covetousness? A good paying job? Your own home? No more bills? A loving husband? A submissive wife? Obedient children? Parents that give you more freedom? Health, wealth, fame, or security? There may be nothing inherently wrong with these things, but if you have to have them in order to be content, you will never know true contentment—that is the sin of discontentment.

5. Beloved, if you are yet discontent with what Jesus has graciously and abundantly given to you, what makes you think you would be content if He were to give you what you want? That is the point. Our desires and wants are not satisfied until they are satisfied in Jesus. When we complain about what we want and do not have, we are complaining against God and His providence as if we deserved better from Him. It is one thing to earnestly pray for that which we need, and yet to be content in Him until He supplies it, and another thing to be discontent and to covet what we do not have. You will either choose to be discontent by looking to persons or things in this life, or you will choose to be content by looking to Christ alone as the source of your joy. You cannot blame your lack of joy on not having certain things in this life or on the way others treat you. Your duty is to find your contentment in Jesus. And when you do not, that is your sin of discontentment (Hebrews 13:5-6).

C. Paul says he had "learned" (not merely knew or professed) in whatsoever state he was in to be content. In other words, contentment did not come natural to him. He learned contentment in the School of Christ every day. Although the grace of contentment (like all graces received from God) was implanted in him at his regeneration, he had to work out that grace in his life which God has worked within him (Philippians 2:12-13). Paul had to learn (by God's grace) to exercise that grace of contentment in every circumstance, so that over a period of time he learned to be content, to rejoice, and to be thankful even in the most distressful circumstances (2 Corinthians 4:8-10). The reason why Paul could learn contentment in all such circumstances (and it is unlikely that we could compare our afflictions with his) is that Jesus Christ was his life (Philippians 1:21). Jesus was not simply one part of Paul's life. Jesus was Paul's life. Christ gave meaning and purpose to everything in Paul's life (whether he lacked or abounded, whether he was abased or exalted, whether he was ill or well, whether he was stoned, whipped, and imprisoned, or whether he was deserted by his closest friends).

1. Beloved, Jesus Christ is all-sufficient to make you truly content in this life, regardless of the trials, afflictions, suffering, and tribulations you are facing in life or in your marriage (the "whatsoever state" does not exclude anything in your life or mine). The Lord (through Paul) calls you to contentment instead of dreaming about how life might have been, if only you had done this or not done that, or if only this

would have worked out instead of not working out. Dear ones, you cannot re-write your life, and spend the rest of your life dreaming and fantasizing how life would presently be if only _____.

2. The reason we as Christians have not learned contentment is because we have not learned consciously to make Christ our life in all our disappointments, discouragements, pains, trials, and afflictions. Dear ones, contentment is learned in adversity, but is also practiced in prosperity. We forget in prosperity that our contentment is still in Jesus.

II. Contentment in All Circumstances Is Realized through Faith Not Sight (Philippians 4:13).

A. Immediately our cry ascends unto the Lord, “I don’t have the strength to learn and practice this contentment in my life or marriage. I am so very weak when it comes to giving in to coveting and wanting what I do not have, to self-pity, to worry, to complaining, and to discontentment.” Well then, you are ready to hear how and only how you can daily put off discontentment and put on contentment.

B. Consider this promise Paul embraced by faith (not by sight) in order that he might learn and practice contentment in the face of every trial and tribulation in life: Philippians 4:13. Nothing is impossible when Jesus is your strength. Without Him, you can do nothing (John 15:5); but with Him, you can do all things that He calls you to do for His glory (Philippians 4:13). If Jesus overcame even death, is there anything so great that He is not greater still? How big is your God? Jesus is your strength—contentment in Him is yours in whatever you face.

C. The Greek verb is in the mood of fact and reality, “I can do.” It is not in the mood of mere possibility or probability, “I may or might do.” Is this the promise to which your struggling faith clings? If so, you will have the strength of Christ to learn contentment in all circumstances. And even more than that, Paul says, “I can do ALL things (not SOME things) through Christ who strengthens me” (i.e. all things which the Lord gives me to do in my calling as a Christian husband or wife). In sickness or in health, in trials or in blessings, in losses or in gains, when there are disagreements or agreements, you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you in learning to be content. It is not your strength or power, but His resurrection power that works in you. God is not a liar. It is absolutely true. Believe it. Practice it. Lean not on your own understanding. Walk by faith in the promises of God.

D. In times of hardship within a marriage, God lays bare that in which you trust and hope. All pretense and superficiality flee in the face of severe trials, and there is revealed in your life one of two responses.

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus who loves you with an everlasting love and promises to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory through your union and communion with Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

2. Unbelief in Him (like Israel of old who though they witnessed God’s miraculous salvation in sending 10 astounding plagues upon Egypt, in dividing the Red Sea, in destroying the army of Pharaoh in it, and in sending food from heaven to feed them, yet revealed their unbelief in such a loving, faithful, and mighty God by complaining, “Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?” Psalm 78:19).

3. If the Lord should delay or withhold from you that which you pray for, will you be content in knowing that Jesus is your life and will you trust Him in knowing that He is infinitely wise and that He delays or withholds that for which you have sought for your greater good from a heart of everlasting love for you? Is Jesus enough in all of the trials of life and in your marriage (Habakkuk 3:17-18)?

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