

How to be Content

Hebrews 13:5-6

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We live in a culture that puts a high value on being happy and having the kind of success that is expected to be the perfect picture of contentment. The assumption of many people is that those who have attained worldly success and are achieving their goals in life are fulfilled and therefore happy, which presupposes they are also content.

In fact, the idea of experiencing happiness is so embedded in our culture that we have happy meals, happy hour, and we are cautioned, “don’t worry, be happy!” The Walt Disney Company’s vision statement at one time was “to make people happy,” and while you are in their parks, you are told you are in “the happiest place on earth.”

The story is told of a Jewish man in Hungary went to his rabbi and complained, “Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?” The rabbi answered, “Take your goat into the room with you.” The man was incredulous, but the rabbi insisted, “Do as I say and come back in a week.”

A week later the man returned looking more distraught than before. “We can’t stand it,” he told the rabbi. “The goat is filthy.” The rabbi said, “Go home and let the goat out, and come back in a week.” A week later the man returned, radiant, exclaiming, “Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there’s no goat—only the nine of us.” (*Reader’s Digest* [12/81].)

Contentment is more a matter of our perspective than of our circumstances, isn’t it!

So, what does it mean to be content? Let me give you a couple of definitions.

1. The first is from Sinclair Ferguson. He’s a professor and pastor in South Carolina. He said, “Contentment is the direct fruit of having no higher ambition than to belong to the Lord at His disposal.” So when we use the word “contentment,” that’s what we mean. One who is content in a gospel-centered way is one who has no higher ambition than to be at the Lord’s disposal. It is one who says, “The aim of my life is for God to do with me whatever He wills. Because He is my Father and I trust Him.” That’s what it means to be content, to have no higher ambition than to belong to the Lord at His disposal.
2. Jeremiah Burroughs said this about contentment. “Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.”

I think that these two definitions are great summaries of what Paul means when he says, “I have learned to be content.” When we talk about this word this morning, this is what we mean. Our highest ambition is to be the Lord’s and to be at His disposal. That’s what it means to be content.

Our short text this morning is Hebrews 13:5-6.

“Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper;
I will not fear;
what can man do to me?”

The exhortation of our text may stem from what the author of Hebrews said in 10:34, where he reminded them that in the former days (10:32), “you ... accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.”

But now they needed endurance (10:36). Perhaps after their property had been unlawfully seized, anxiety had set in. Some of them now were focused on regaining their possessions, no matter what it required. But, pursuing material things can easily cross the line into loving them. And the love of money or things (13:5) is opposed to the love of the brethren (13:1).

That is why we should be encouraged by the words of the apostle Paul, who stated that he learned to be content no matter what his circumstances: “not that I’m speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

In other words, he could show contentment even in the worst situations, his contentment wasn’t based on what was happening around him.

The Bible makes it clear being content is something that must be learned while living in obedience to Jesus Christ each day in the midst of our circumstances whether we are happy or sad, whether or not we have attained success in life.

The search for contentment is not new. Man has been in pursuit of this elusive quality since the beginning of time. In fact, the first two people on earth were not content to live in the garden God had prepared for them, where it certainly could be said that “they had it all.”

They had ample food, no weeds to pull, no diseases to fight, and no poor weather patterns or natural disasters like earthquakes. They were in perfect health, and didn’t have to worry about security because that was already provided for in an intimate relationship with the all – powerful God of the universe.

That is what it was like for Adam and Eve. But they were not content. Instead, they had a desire to be like God, to be independent of God, to know as much as God did about good and evil. Adam and Eve thought they would find contentment in their independence from God. Instead, they found that they were discontent. And they became fearful as well, for they recognize that they were naked and without protection.

So contentment has always been elusive. But why?

Solomon tackle this question in Ecclesiastes:

- He calls the futility of chasing after things, “vanity and striving after the wind” (1:14)
- “the eye is not satisfied with seeing” (1:8)
- “not the ear filled with hearing” (1:8)
- “his eyes are never satisfied with riches” (4:8)
- “his appetite is not satisfied” (6:7)

What we are up against here is a covetous heart. The minute we are told we cannot have something that is the very thing we must have it.

Based on our text in Hebrews, learning to be content requires us understanding three major principles:

Principle Number One: Definite Separation (13:5a)

Contentment is not found in:

- Purses
- Possessions
- Places
- Positions
- Or people

1. We Have Wrong Attachments

1 Peter 1: 15 "15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

God put his church into the world to change it. Unfortunately, the world tends to change the church.

Wrong attachments manifest themselves in conflict. Or so says the Holy Spirit:

- James 3 – there are quarrels among you because you want your own way
- Gal. 5 – you are devouring one another
- Philippians 4 – the account of two sisters fighting in the church

If we really examine ourselves closely, we find that we desire the same attachments as the unbeliever.

2. We Have Temporal Attachments

Wealth – *Philippians 4:11-12, "Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."*

Maybe Google says it best:

Money can buy medicine, but not health.

Money can buy a house, but not a home.

Money can buy companionship, but not friends.

Money can buy entertainment, but not happiness.

Money can buy food, but not an appetite.

Money can buy a bed, but not sleep.

Money can buy a crucifix, but not a Savior.

Money can buy the good life, but not eternal life.

That explains why we are told in the Scriptures that it is God (alone) who is able to supply us "with all things to enjoy."

3. We Have Future Attachments

What do you covet that you are working toward in the future?

I'm not talking about retirement or savings, but are you saving, or hoarding?

Principle Number Two: Immediate Satisfaction (13:5b)

God desires that we be satisfied right now with:

- **What You Have – I Timothy 6:6, 8**

6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.

8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

- **Where You Are –**

- With Advancement – Psalm 75:6-7

6 For not from the east, nor from the west, Nor from the desert comes exaltation;

*7 But *God is the Judge; He *puts down one and exalts another.*

- With Daily Events – Psalm 139:16b

*And in *Your book were all written The *days that were ordained for me, When as yet there was not one of them.*

- With "Chance" Events – Proverbs 16:33

The lot is cast into the lap, But its decision is from the LORD

Principle Number Three: Intimate Communion (5c-6)

My Grandparents took a mule ride down the Grand Canyon years ago. When descending the Grand Canyon, often a person has to travel on narrow ledges that have only enough room for a mule to get a foothold. The ribbons of rock that run along the edges of these towering cliffs overlook vertical precipices that descend hundreds of feet to the valley below. When one must make use of these stony paths, the safest course is to let the mule find his own way; for the slightest touch on the bridle may easily throw both the animal and his rider over the cliff to sudden death. So it is in the believer's life. In some circumstances, if he would keep himself from having sinful doubts and falling into despair, he must lay the 'bridle' on the neck of Faith, and commit his way to God. No matter how things look, he may take comfort in these words, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." In such trying experiences the only thing to do is to trust in God and walk by faith, not by sight.

Let me put it another way –

You need to realign your life under God and His authority

It's like our car. Sometimes it needs an alignment and we don't even know it.

- We don't feel the front tires pulling.
- We don't feel any shimmy
- You don't always see it.

But one way to check and see if you need an alignment is to check the tires.

- They can check for excess wear and tear
- They can check for uneven wear

To determine that you don't have a tire problem per se, but an alignment problem that is the cause.

And some of you today are looking at your lives and seeing your tread worn bare and your tears worn out way too soon. We struggle with the day to day contentment of life and so every month or two we attempt to fix it by changing our spiritual tires.

What you need however is an alignment.

No matter how many new tires you put on the car, unless you get your alignment fixed – they are just going to wear out too soon again.

- Some of you are not content with your marriages and you think you need to change tires – but you really have an alignment problem.
- Some of you are not content with some of the things that go on in this church and you think you need to change tires - but you really have an alignment problem.
- Some of you are not content with your life in general and think you need to change tires, and maybe even get new wheels - but you really have an alignment problem.

CONCLUSION

Let's close with verse 6

So we can confidently say,

“The Lord is my helper;

I will not fear;

what can man do to me?”

- We must learn to lean on His provision – The Lord is my helper
- We must learn to trust His Promises – I will not fear, what can man do to me
- We must learn to love His Person – And when we do this we develop great confidence

You and I are struggling with being content primarily because of our trust in God. You and I are not struggling with being content primarily because we're single, because of our job, because of our spouse, because of our bank account or because of our living arrangements. You and I struggle with contentment primarily because we struggle and we fail to trust God. That's why discontentment surfaces in our lives in all the ways that it does. Deep down, we struggle badly with trusting God and believing that God is what is best for us and always does what is best for us. We struggle to trust Him in that and to hope in Him in that. And because we do, we are discontent in a myriad of ways.

“It is good for us to be sobered by how horrible our discontentment is. It's not just a respectable sin that we can deal with here and there. It is something to be killed in us. I don't know if you've ever sat down and thought deeply about what is actually beneath your discontentment, but it's pretty ugly stuff. When you flip that rock over, what's there is not

good. What's underneath and causing the discontentment that arises and surfaces in our life is not good." Beau Hughes - 11/13/2011

In his book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Jeremiah Burroughs wrote: "To be content as a result of some external thing is like warming a man's clothes by the fire. But to be content through an inward disposition of the soul is like the warmth that a man's clothes have from the natural heat of his body."

If you belong to Christ, like the apostle Paul, you can and should learn the secret of a contented life. When Paul wrote "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim 6:6) he wasn't just speaking philosophically. He had learned the secret to contentment in every circumstance of life. While that secret eludes most people, it need not elude the true believer.

If we live above our circumstances, rest in God's provision, and give thanks for all things, we can find the contentment that brings incredible peace and joy in following Jesus.