

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## Contentment in Christ—Part 1

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It might be the most elusive of all Christian virtues, except for perhaps humility—contentment. I am not naturally content. In my fallen nature I am naturally discontent. I am not content because I am always playing out in my mind what Paul Tripp calls the “if only” life: If only I had more money in my bank account, I’d be content, if only I had a church that follows my leadership, if only my children were better behaved, if only I had a job that I enjoyed. . . . For the progeny of Adam, the “if onlys” are endless. In our self-idolatry, we tend to think that a change in circumstances will bring us joy and contentment. For us, the grass is always greener unless we learn to find our contentment in something that is transcendent and eternal.

Apparently, the apostle Paul waged this frustrating internal war as well. In [Philippians 4](#), he tells the church there that he had “learned the secret” of being content in any and every circumstance. The secret? It is found in [Phil. 4:13](#), a verse we typically deploy to make Christians seem like Popeye with Christ as the spinach, a people who can accomplish literally anything their minds can perceive (a New Age concept) because of Christ: “I can do all things through him (Christ) who strengthens me.”

Actually, Paul’s words, when properly understood, are far more expansive than the quasi-prosperity interpretation of that verse: Because of Christ, we can accomplish contentment no matter what circumstances a day brings into our lives. Why is contentment so important and why is it so elusive? It is important first to understand how deeply sinful is our discontentment.

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As expert physicians of the soul, the Puritans wrote much and thought deeply about this crucial topic. Among the excellent Puritan works on contentment (several Puritan works on this topic have been republished by Banner of Truth) are [The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment](#) by Jeremiah Burroughs, [The Art of Divine Contentment](#) by Thomas Watson, [The Crook in the Lot](#) by Thomas Boston and an excellent sermon by Boston titled “The Hellish Sin of Discontent.” A very good and inexpensive e-book titled [The Art and Grace of Contentment](#) is available on Amazon which compiles many Puritan books (included the three just listed), sermons (including the Boston sermon) and articles on contentment.

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Boston’s exposition of the sin of discontentment in light of the 10th Commandment shows the practical atheism that a lack of contentment insinuates. Boston (1676-1732), a pastor and son of Scottish Covenanters, argues that the 10th commandment forbids discontentment—covetousness. Why? Because:

- Discontentment is a mistrusting of God. Contentment is trusting God implicitly. Thus, discontent is the opposite of faith.
- Discontentment amounts to complaining against God’s plan. In my desire to be sovereign, I think my plan for me is better. As Paul Tripp well puts it, “I love me and have a wonderful plan for my life.”
- Discontentment exhibits a desire to be sovereign. See No. 2. Like Adam and Eve, we desire to taste of the tree that will transform us into sovereign kings.
- Discontentment covets something God has not been pleased to give us. He gave us His Son, therefore, can we not trust him for the trivial things? ([Rom. 8:32](#))
- Discontentment subtly (or perhaps not so subtly) communicates that God has made a mistake. My present circumstances are wrong and they should be otherwise. I will only be content when they change to suit my desires.
- Discontentment denies the wisdom of God and exalts my wisdom. Isn’t this precisely what Eve did in the garden in questioning the goodness of God’s Word? Thus, discontentment was at the heart of the first sin. “Has God really said?” That’s the question at the heart of all our discontentment.

In [Part 2](#), I will look at the positive side of this doctrine and how Paul learned contentment and how we might too. Once again, I will call upon the witness of our Puritan forebears for some penetrating biblical insights.

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