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Contentment in Christ—Part 2

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1



So unusual is contentment in a fallen human being, that Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs called it “a rare jewel.” Nothing exhibits Christian maturity like contentment in Christ and nothing unmasks our immaturity like discontentment, which I examined in [Part 1](#) of this series. Yet, contentment is elusive. The writer of Proverbs alludes to this in 27:20b, “. . . never satisfied are the eyes of man.”

What is contentment? Burroughs defines it this way: “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 . . . It is the inward submission of the heart.” Similarly, Michael Scott Horton asserts that “Being content with life means accepting the circumstances in which God’s providence has placed me.”

My own definition is brief, but strikes at the heart of the sin of discontentment: contentment is the opposite of covetousness. It is the opposite of covetousness because the coveting heart says, I deserve better than what God has given me, a better ministry position, a better job, a better spouse, better children, a better socioeconomic position. . . better. Discontentment runs at cross purposes with the tenth commandment. And fallen man is a discontented lot.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

But there is good news for followers of Jesus Christ. In [Philippians 4](#), Paul says he learned the secret of contentment in any and every circumstance. Paul, the great apostle, Paul the author of Romans and Galatians and Ephesians and much more, Paul, whom the Lord took up into the third heaven, who encountered Jesus tangibly on the road to Damascus, had to learn contentment. That fact alone encourages us with hope and reminds us that sanctification indeed progresses in fits and starts over the course of a life.

2

How did he do it? Paul cultivated contentment in his life by reaching a settled conclusion that Christ was enough for him. He was willing to say in fashion similar to Luther, “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also...” As I pointed out previously, that is at the heart of the meaning of [Phil. 4:13](#), “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” It’s not a promise that adding a little Jesus to my daily repertoire will push me to perform superhuman feats, but a promise that is far more expansive: I can find peace and joy in this life, no matter the intensity of the storm that swirls around me, when Christ is my pearl of great price.

But how may I cultivate this most elusive of virtues? With a little help from Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his [exposition of Philippians](#) coupled with few of my own insights, here are a six thoughts:

1. Conditions and circumstances in life are always changing, therefore my satisfaction and joy must not be tied to circumstances. Jesus must not be one who merely meets our material and physical needs. Jesus is not a divine ATM. John Piper’s words are sobering

and penetrating here: “I’ll tell you what makes Jesus look beautiful. It’s when you smash your car and your little child smashes through the windshield and lands dead on the street, and you say, through the deepest possible pain, ‘God is enough. He is good. He will take care of us. He will satisfy us. He will see us through this. He is our treasure.’ Whom I in heaven but you and on earth there is nothing that I besides you, my flesh and my heart and my little child may fail, but you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever. That makes God look glorious as God, not as giver of cars or safety or health...God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him in the midst of loss, not prosperity.” Thus, contentment comes when I melt my will and my desires into Christ’s will and desires, even when I struggle to understand my circumstances.



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2. What matters supremely in life is my soul and my relationship to God. Christ’s death and resurrection is my only hope. Hope may be our most powerful possession. Hope is the sunshine and rain of our life—it is what makes us grow and thrive. Without it, we

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won't flourish. An old saying applies here: "Human beings can live 40 days without food, four days without water, and four minutes without air, but we can't live four seconds without hope." And we have a sure and settled hope as the anchor of our souls ([Heb. 6:19](#)).

3. God is concerned about me as my Father, and nothing happens to me apart from His will. Even the hairs on my head are numbered. He is meticulously sovereign. He is good and he delights to give good gifts to his children ([Matt. 7:7-11](#)).

4. God's will and God's ways are a great mystery, but I know that whatever he wills or permits is for my good. Every situation in life is an unfolding of some manifestation of God's love and goodness. Therefore, my business is to look for each special manifestation of God's goodness and be prepared for surprises and blessings. [Romans 8:28](#) is not a trite cliché, but a glorious promise for God's children that serves as solid ground for their feet.

5. I must not regard my circumstances and conditions in and of themselves, but as part of God's dealings with me in the work of perfecting my soul and bringing me to final perfection. In a life east of Eden, suffering will be a major part of this. We must burn into our minds and hearts the words of the psalmist in 145:17, "The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works."

6. Whatever my conditions may be at this present moment, they are only temporary, they are passing, and they can never rob me of the joy and the glory that ultimately await me in Christ. To be content, I must realize that my inheritance is in heaven and it is being guarded to be revealed on the last day ([1 Peter 1:4](#)). Paul called his affliction momentary and light ([2 Cor. 4:16-18](#)), even though he suffered in ways the vast majority of us never will. See his ministry resume in [2 Cor. 11:16-29](#) for a stunning laundry list of Paul's sufferings in service of the gospel.

Next time, in [Part 3](#), I will examine what a contented life in Christ looks like in the full-court press of everyday life.



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