



Peninsula City Church

The Radical Christian

Contentment a Radical Value

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Contentment a radical value

An Introduction

Q. Are you in a place of contentment, in the face of life's challenges?

In light of this question, a statement like the following one just highlights the discontent in certain worldviews.

"I find the enemy of contentment is not a laundry list of things. It's that one item that comes to mind when you survey your life and think, 'If I just had this one thing, then it would all be good'... No longer just 'one thing,' my desire for the thing grows until it overwhelms the scenery of life. It becomes a constant hum of discontentment. It's a gnawing pest eating away at joy. It's a void that happy times trip over and disappear into. The lack of the 'one thing' soon dwarfs the existence of all the other things, all other blessings in life."¹

As a Christ-follower, have you ever searched for contentment and could not find it. Well, you are not alone, just look around you. But, why are some many Christ-followers suffering from discontentment? It has been said that,

"Contentment is so far removed from many Christians that it seems that they will never be able to find it or be at peace. Christians get trapped into a discontented life by adopting worldly goals: more, bigger, and best. The Bible identifies these as indulgence, greed, and pride."²

But looking at this matter from a lighter but true perspective it's been said that,

"There is an old joke worth sharing:

'What is the difference between you and God?'

'I don't know, what is the difference?'

'God never gets confused and thinks He's you!'

When I am busy playing God, I ignore God. I don't ask any questions of God or about God. I don't need to. I dig the hole a lot deeper and refuse to let Him fill it. Or if I do ask a question, it's not a real question, and I'm not listening for an answer... MY PARTICULAR RECIPE for crazy was made up of five key ingredients: distraction, multitasking, over-commitment, comparison, and pressure.³

So, if we could live in a place of contentment as a radical value in the face of life's challenges, what is contentment?

1. Contentment

Q. What is contentment as a radical value?

Let's begin by asking, 'Do you know how not to play the comparison game, but live in a state of contentment? What does contentment look like from your end of the world?' Well, it might look different to all of us. But there are some common features, which it is not and that it is,

"Contentment is not a carefree existence or the absence of relational conflicts and anguish. It is not a life without longing and groaning in our distress or freedom from fear and anxiety. It is

¹ "Is Discontentment Ruining Your Spiritual Life?" <https://relevantmagazine.com/life/discontentment-ruining-your-spiritual-life> (3rd October 2017).

² "Learning Contentment." <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/managing-money/breaking-free-from-debt/learning-contentment> (3rd October 2017).

³ Johnson, Nicole. *Creating Calm in the Center of Crazy: Making Room for Your Soul in an Overcrowded Life*. (p. 103, 104, 181). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

not freedom from the fight against sin. However, true contentment is rejoicing that our heavenly situation is secure, with our mindset on spiritual matters. We understand that nothing could happen to us except that which was ultimately for our good. We know that God is for us. We trust in the one relationship that will never fail.”⁴

However, contentment can be more than mere snippets of time. It can be a state that can live in, work in, and play. Some people seem to thrive in discontentment (I don’t know how, but they do). It has been said that,

“We want to complexify our lives. We don’t have to; we want to. We want to be harried and hassled and busy. Unconsciously, we want the very things we complain about. For if we had leisure, we would look at ourselves and listen to our hearts and see the great gaping hole in our hearts and be terrified, because that hole is so big that nothing but God can fill it. In the midst of life’s twists and turns, the good news remains constant: We are not condemned. The Spirit lives within us. God works all things for our good. He is for us. Nothing can separate us from God’s love.”⁵

There is a condition that Christ-followers can live in that is the state of radical contentment. The word content comes from the Latin *contentus* containing the idea of being satisfied.⁶

“Webster defines contentment as ‘the state of being contented: satisfaction...not desiring more than one has: satisfied; resigned to circumstances, assenting, satisfied with things as they are.’ In the Bible, content is from two words. The first word, *arkeo*; means ‘to be possessed of un failing strength, to be strong, to suffice, to be enough; passively to be satisfied with a thing, contented.’ The second, *autarkeia* describes ‘a perfect condition of life in which no aid or support is needed; hence, sufficiency of the necessities of life: contentment.’”⁷

Hence, to be content is a state or condition of being satisfied or calm. Then by adding the suffix ‘-ment’ to ‘content,’ it expresses the means or result flowing from the action of being content. Contentment should overflow into every area of our life with an inner calmness, satisfaction and calming rest. This is a state of being in a safe place of gratification and is a calming remedy for inner turmoil. This comes from God who is like a refreshing waterfall that cascades over our soul.

“Contentment is the virtue of being calm and satisfied rather than always demanding more.”
Myers, Jeff. *Understanding The Culture: A Survey of Social Engagement*. Summit Worldview Library. (Manitou Springs, MO: David. C Cook, 2017), 179

The idea of contentment contains submission, pleasure and satisfaction. It is something that needs to be learnt from being with Christ. This learning comes from the experiences that life sends our way and those around us as we walk with Him.⁸

2. Learning to live in the place of contentment

Q. So, do you know how not to play the comparison game, but be content?

There is a game that many play; it is called the comparison game. Those who play this game are not content with their own life and compare it with those around them. They live in the state of

⁴ “Looking for Contentment? It’s not What You Think.”

<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/melissakruger/2016/09/13/contentment-is-not/> (3rd October 2017).

⁵ Kreeft, Peter. *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal’s Pensées Edited, Outlined, and Explained*. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 168.

⁶ “Content.” http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=content (2nd October 2017).

⁷ “Teaching Values: Contentment.” <http://www.bibleclassbooks.com/teaching-values/contentment.html> (2nd October 2017)

⁸ Teaching Values: Contentment.” <http://www.bibleclassbooks.com/teaching-values/contentment.html> (2nd October 2017)

discontent with their life. They are not satisfied with what they have and do and try to find contentment in being someone or somewhere else. They may have picked up this attitude from their parents, those who they do life with or even from the message that media blasts at us.

The following is an illustration of the perspective regarding the state of contentment.

Be Content Where you are (a story),

“The story is told about a pilot who always looked down intently on a certain valley which was part of a certain mountain range when the plane passed overhead. One day his co-pilot asked, ‘What’s so interesting about that spot?’ The pilot replied, ‘See that stream? Well, when I was a kid I used to sit down there on a log and fish. Every time an aeroplane flew over, I would look up and wish I were flying... Now I look down and wish I were fishing.’

It is always tempting to think that others have it better than we do and that if we just had ‘a little more’ everything would be fine. But contentment cannot be achieved by increasing possessions. Nothing will ever be enough. Source: Unknown.”⁹

Paul, in contrast, said that he had learned how to be radically content whatever the circumstances. His contentment was not found in things that had an earthly origin. Although he did use these things, he did not let them use him. Paul highlighted here how he acquired the state of contentment; it was through learning to focus on and submitting to the Lord. He said that,

¹⁰ “How I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but you didn’t have the chance to help me. ¹¹ Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. ¹³ For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Phil 4:10-13 NLT).

Notice Paul here said that he had learned how to be content or self-sufficient with whatever he had. He had come to a place in his life that He had learned to live in the state of contentment. He then went on to explain what this actually looked like in life. He pointed out that whatever he had was sufficient for him, because of the strength that comes from Christ. His contentment was separate of any external circumstances. This state of being content that he was speaking of was only found in Christ the One who continually is strengthening Paul.

Paul then went on to point this truth out to Timothy when he wrote his first letter to him. Paul had learnt to live in this state of contentment and so wanted to help Timothy to do the same. He said that he needed to focus on godliness, which is very valuable.¹⁰ Paul said,

⁶ “Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth (or gain). ⁷ After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it. ⁸ So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. ⁹ But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. ¹¹ But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have declared so well before many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:6-12 NLT).

⁹ “Be Content Where you are.” <http://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/be-content-where-you-are> (3rd October 2017).

¹⁰ “Lesson 21: Prescription for Contentment (1 Timothy 6:6-8).” <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-21-prescription-contentment-1-timothy-66-8> (3rd October 2017).

Paul highlighted the truth to Timothy in verse 6 that true godliness with contentment (sufficiency or satisfaction) is itself great wealth. It is not found in money, or wealth of any kind, rather the only wealth worth having is true godliness with contentment. This is not merely as it has been said,

“...a passive acceptance of the *status quo*, it’s the positive assurance that God has supplied one’s needs, and the consequent release from unnecessary desire.”¹¹

Paul when on to point out in verse 8 that Christ-followers need to be content with the strength needed to live in this state. They are to rest in whatever we have and whatever place we find ourselves in life. As Paul said in verse 7, “After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it.” Therefore,

“So what does contentment mean? *It is an inner sense of rest or peace that comes from being right with God and knowing that He is in control of all that happens to us.*”¹²

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. Are you in a place of contentment, in the face of life’s challenges?

So, will we ever learn not to play the comparison game, but be content? Are you in a place of contentment, in the face of life’s challenges? Are you living a calm life with a crazy centre or a crazy life with a calm centre?¹³ So as it has been said,

“Never be in a hurry; do everything quietly and in a calm spirit. Do not lose your inner peace for anything whatsoever, even if your whole world seems upset.”¹⁴

We need to learn how to live in the state of contentment. That place of inner rest or peace knowing that we are right with God and that He is in charge of our life. Remember that,

“Contentment is not something that must be searched for and found. It is an attitude of the heart. Once the attitude has been modified, and all has been transferred to God, contentment will be evident.”¹⁵

It has been said on the matter of the challenge to the state of content place in Jesus Christ that,

“I find the enemy of contentment is not a laundry list of things. It’s that one item that comes to mind when you survey your life and think, “If I just had this one thing, then it would all be good... When the ‘one thing’ looms large, and those seasons come and go, I turn my anxious thoughts to thank God for the many things He has given, one of the greatest of which is the comfort of knowing he has not forgotten His good plans for me.”¹⁶

The following a poem called A Place of Contentment, by Mandy Fernandez

A place I have missed visiting
A place I once tried to push away
A place I slipped from furiously
A place for simply another day.

¹¹ Connell, J.C. “Contentment.” In *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary: Part 1: Aaron-Golan*. (Leicester, England: IVP, 1986), 312

¹² “Lesson 27: The Secret for Contentment (Philippians 4:10-13).” <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-27-secret-contentment-philippians-410-13> (3rd October 2017).

¹³ Johnson, Nicole. *Creating Calm in the Center of Crazy: Making Room for Your Soul in an Overcrowded Life*. (p. 204, 205). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

¹⁴ Morgan, Robert J. *All to Jesus: A Year of Devotions*. (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012), 203.

¹⁵ “Learning Contentment.” <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges/managing-money/breaking-free-from-debt/learning-contentment> (3rd October 2017).

¹⁶ “Is Discontentment Ruining Your Spiritual Life?” <https://relevantmagazine.com/life/discontentment-ruining-your-spiritual-life> (3rd October 2017).

A place I thought unworthy
A place I didn't appreciate
A place I deemed trivial
A place to almost hate.

A place to prevent growth
A place to stump my mind
A place not on the road ahead
A place to leave behind.

But now this place is all I want
This place for me to be
A place I underestimated
A place I now clearly see.

This place is called contentment
This place is currently ease
This place is simple joy
In this place, I do what I please.

This place is me in a balance
This place is enjoyment now
This place is me feeling blessed
In this place, I now bow.

Why did it take so long?
To find this place called contentment
It was beside me all this time
Whispering, giving me a hint.

I thought I needed more
More challenge, more everything I said
Yet now I just want to dwell here
No more looking back or ahead.

Stay close by contentment
I adore having you around
Revealing the real magic
Of love, life and joy abound."¹⁷

¹⁷ Fernandez, Mandy. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/place-contentment-poem-mandy-fernandez> (3rd October 2017).