**Studies on Christian Contentment**

***Feeding Our Souls, Part 2***

*Hebrews 13:1-6*

(see also: Mt. 6:24; 7:24-27; 16:25; 1 Pet. 4:8)

*Let brotherly love continue.Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. 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.” So we can confidently say,*

*“The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:1-6, ESV)*

 Brothers and sisters, as we have already learned, there are two essential sides to the subject of Christian contentment.

1. **There is the necessary indwelling of God’s Spirit**. Christian contentment comes first as a gift and a blessing.

*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;*

*(Gal. 5:22-23, ESV)*

 Think back upon your own conversion experience. Many of you first came to Christ as a broken and convicted sinner. You had first sought pleasure and greed in the world and your emptiness was your real reward. But by confessing your sins and confessing Christ as Lord, you were brought to deliverance and salvation – you were forgiven, and you were redeemed! You were not punished as you feared; instead, you were given a new and eternal life. And with that gift came the blessing of peace – a peace that still surpasses all your understanding, a peace that still means the world to you. Christian contentment is not something you have had to invent, not something you have merely imagined or created in your own mind in order to persuade yourself and others that you are, indeed, ok and that you are not just hiding or masking disappointment. God, the Holy Spirit, has given this to you and that makes all the difference.

1. **There is also a need to answer the call, duty, and responsibility of growing in Christlikeness** - of testifying to the world of the power and promise of God. You were made alive by the gospel – that is, indeed, a miracle of miracles. But now, you are called to live that gospel. You might have thought, at first, that if the Holy Spirit dwells in you – if he has truly transformed you – then living the gospel cannot be that hard - that the ultimate formula for the Christian life is just to *let go and let God*. But now, you have come to realize that you are still faced with internal and sinful temptations and wrestling. Many things that did not disappear with your conversion – things that you craved before – you are not yet completely free from. And now, those temptations spread like a net at your feet. You wanted them before. You don’t want them now. But they are still there.

 You might be ashamed, as a Christian, that those things are still there and you are perplexed at how you must still struggle at times. You also read of Jesus’ warnings and admonitions to you as a disciple, of how he taught his disciples that in order to follow him, they must deny themselves, pick up their crosses daily, and must be despised by the world even as he was. You might have heard of Christian martyrs who have gone before you who have suffered greatly for the gospel, and who were even called to lay down their lives at the hands of hateful and greedy people. You fear what high calling might be before you.

 And yet, even as those who went before you were called upon to do all of that, they faced those trials not with a spirit of courage only but with a spirit of contentment. Even when their lives were being taken from them they were not ashamed of the gospel. Paul wrote in Phil. 1:21: “to live is Christ & to die is gain”. No one who does not have the Holy Spirit in them understands what that means. And no one who commits himself to the service of Christ will grasp the truth of what Jesus meant when he said:

*whoever would save his life will lose it,*

*but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Mt. 16:25 ESV)*

It is the one who lives in discontent who envies, lusts, grabs for, clutches, who mocks the ones who are not like him, who tend to be miserable with life itself – he is the one who, ultimately, has and gains nothing. But the contented Christian heart knows what those words of Paul mean, and because he understands them, he truly believes them and wants to live by them. There is no loss of anything in this life or in this world that will not bring you more, greater, and higher.

 Now, as we look to feed and strengthen our souls toward contentment, we first looked at Ps. 73. We truly identified with Asaph in the temptations of his heart. But we also had to admit, we are not typically as candid with God about them as he was! But you learned how you are strengthened against temptation by recognizing and rejecting your tendency to worship the things in this world and simply return to the necessary worship of the Lord your God. **Psalm 73 was your reality check**. Those words reminded you of the truth of God’s righteous character and of his eternal judgment of the wicked right at the times when you are most likely to forget those things and disregard them.

 Now, I want to look at these verses in Hebrews 13, and discover again how our souls are strengthened - simply by returning again to a Christian life well lived – that means, having the priorities, habits, and practices that reinforce, strengthen, and testify to your faith. None of the things here are profound or ingenious; none of them are going to deliver you or free you from a corrosive spirit of discontent all by themselves. But they are the kinds of things that Christians do to answer the call to live as disciples, things that Christians can easily overlook when discouragement comes over you and discontent begins to breed.

 **#1) Let brotherly love continue**. This is that *phileo* type of love that speaks of comradeship and partnering. This love carries with it the least amount of emotion. Becoming a Christian means you have been adopted – you are adopted into the family of God and, as precious as your natural family relations are, this new familial bond actually exceeds that. So, ‘brotherly love’ means more than just a mutual admiration or a friendly composure at church on Lord’s days. It includes a commitment and bond to one another – not only to worship together and to carry one another’s burdens, but to labor together as well in useful ways toward the common goal of the lifting up of the name of Christ.

 And yes, that also includes forgiving one another as well. Brotherly love is the opposite of having a consumer-like attitude about church. It speaks of your need and call to exercise reconciliation and restoration, and to cover a multitude of sins, if need be, with this love. You feed your soul on contentment by serving and loving others.

 **#2) Do not neglect the ministry of hospitality**. Christian hospitality is not the same thing as entertaining or hosting a party where everything has to be “just perfect”. Hospitality is a ministry, and a very vital one at that. Hospitality falls under the larger category of discipleship. Hospitality is opening up your home to those who are in need, to those who are traveling or to those who are new to the church, the faith, or just younger in life. Hospitality allows them to see how the gospel has affected your own life and world, and lets them walk away with good, practical lessons they can take to their own homes along with the comforting assurance that they do not have to be perfect after all in order to be a Christian!

 I’m sure you have heard the phrase that *some lessons are more caught then taught*. You can teach a class or hold a seminar or meet someone for lunch at a restaurant and speak to them one on one. Lots of ministry can be done in such ways. But when you invite someone into your home, what you are not teaching them verbally, they are learning by what they see and observe. Such impressions as these teach more than what a person manages to say.

 **#3) Remember those who are in prison**. Now, the context of this reminder speaks about Christians who have been incarcerated or oppressed. It is important that the church does not forget, forsake, or abandon such brothers and sisters. This is hospitality in reverse. You cannot invite them into your home, but you are taking the extra initiative to seek them out – to see and to care for these people in the humiliation of their chains and perhaps their crimes. It is very encouraging to them to have such visitors. You cannot walk out of such places reflecting on your own discontent.

 But this instruction could also speak of the kind of prison ministry that the church of Christ attempts to do in our own day and time. Certainly, we also have a need to see here how we are a part of the larger Christian community all over the world – how we are to have a larger identity as part of Christ’s church and family, how we are to be desirous of supporting Christians in other countries who are abused, arrested, and persecuted, and how we are to be aware of the desperate conditions that come so quickly when a governmental change turns suddenly against the Christian community.

 Here in the United States, we have experienced many slow and subtle changes in which the tide has turned against Christianity. But we must not think that sudden and radical changes are not possible here too. Ministry to others where and when we can will prepare us against such a day when our own contentment in Christ might be sorely tested.

 **#4) Hold marriage in honor among all**. One of the things that clearly separates the Christian from the nonChristian is the divine threat of judgment from breaking the Moral Law of God. The Christian is aware that his sins are committed *Coram Deo*, and that God will call for an accounting for sin; but he rejoices in that Christ has paid for that judgment on the Christian’s behalf. As a result, he is free from the judgment of the law. But still, it is the Christian, Scripture reminds us, who fears the Lord.

*If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*

*But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. (Ps. 130:3-4 ESV)*

The Christian fears the Lord not for the sake of judgment but for the fact that he owes his entire life to his Savior. He is the one who endeavors to live his life according to the Moral Law of God and he does so out of his heartfelt desire to love the one who has first loved him. It is in this way that believers hold to the biblically defined institution of marriage and regard it to be sacrosanct and holy. This is out of their love, obligation and fear of God, and not merely out of social obligation or even out of the meaningfulness of their own promises.

 Christian, if you are in a marriage that marriage is holy. It is and remains holy before God no matter how you might regard it at any given moment or if you ever wished it to be different. If you are discontent in your marriage, know that God calls you to repent of your discontent, your grumbling, and your restlessness, and strive, instead, to honor him by honoring your marriage. That is the only way to find contentment in your marriage.

 Likewise, single people, also, must regard the marriage bond as holy. Young people who are not yet married are not free before the Lord to disregard their own call to sexual purity simply because they rationalize that they have not yet made any such vow and promise, themselves. Single people are called to regard the institution of marriage as holy and to honor the marriage bed as pure and to do so with regard to their own behavior now. They are to respect the bonds of married friends, and they are to respect the holiness of their own bodies as belonging to the Lord.

 You cannot help but notice how stern the preacher of Hebrews is here. Discontent comes as the fruit of sinful choices – first in the mind, then with the eye, then with the whole body. The sexual act is one of the biggest of idols in our society and sex is intensely worshipped today. But you are not to be an idolater.

 **#5) Keep your life free from the love of money**. Now, be sure you understand this. The Christian is not called to forsake aspirations in his or her career – you are to work hard, to seek to move up the so-called ladder, as well as to enjoy the monetary fruit of your labor. Work and prosperity are honorable among men and before God. But the ***love*** of money is idolatry – to live for, pursue, and sacrifice all else for wealth is idolatry. To love any object in all of creation will not only leave you spiritually empty, it will leave you more and more discontent. That is no more readily the case when it comes to riches. The one who loves money is a miser. And even if he should gain the whole world, he will lose his soul. You cannot serve both God and money.

 **#6) Instead, be content with what you have**. Be content! This is the call to self-discipline. Resist the restlessness you feel when you are disappointed with yourself or your surroundings; when you are sure that some change or other kind of make-over will quickly make it all better yet again. Confront the reality of your own idols and do not give them what they demand from you. Realize how empty they really leave you. Be aware of how corrosive your discontent is to you – your life, your job, your marriage, your family – how you are tearing it all down with your own hands. Being content is not just a feeling. Being content is choosing wisely who and what it is that you will depend on as you build and live out your life.

 I am reminded here of Jesus’ parable of the builders in Matthew 7. The one man builds his house (i.e., his life), but he builds it on the sand. It might be a fine house! It could be a mansion! But when the storms of life come - and they do come - the discontent, restlessness, selfishness upon which that man lives his life, they do not support him and it all comes crashing down.

 The other man builds his house on a rock. That means he both heard and obeyed the Word of God. He lived his life depending on God to be there for him and to regard what God gave him as enough. In the eyes of others it may not be much of a house at all – just a hovel, perhaps - but when the challenges of life came upon that man, his life did not collapse around him. It stood through it all. That is not because the man built a better house - it was because of what the man depended on and how he was content to rest in his Lord.

 That is how this charge in Hebrews 13 ends:

*Be content w/what you have for he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Heb. 13:5b, ESV)*

Remember, contentment comes as a gift from the Holy Spirit – no one other than the man who depends on God understands this gift. But contentment is also a discipline we must learn and practice – sometimes long before we will experience the fruit or survive the storms. It is not hard, but it does call you to be different. And different you are! You are bought with a price, adopted into God’s family. The eternal love of the Father is promised unto you. And the inheritance of the ages is yours.