

## “CONTENTMENT”

Luke 3:7-14; 1Timothy 6:3-11

“ I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:11b-13 NKJV)

Carnation was the first canned condensed milk on the market. It was marketed as a milk that was safe and whose quality was consistent. This was in the days when, as Upton Sinclair wrote in The Jungle unscrupulous dairies would add lime water to milk. Carnation had an 818 acre farm where they worked to improve the quality of milk cows. They gave bulls to the farmers that supplied them with milk. This research farm inspired the phrase “the milk from contented cows.”

The aim of marketing is to make sure that we are not contented. One advertisement shows women finding humorous ways to destroy their washing machines, so they can get a new one. One woman throws it out of a second story window, another uses a crane to sling it into a dump, a third woman crushes hers with a bulldozer. In another advertisement we see two women on a busy street wearing an identical dress. One has been washed 50 times with Woolite, the other was washed 50 times with ordinary detergent. The most unbelievable ones are for diet aids – “I used to be a size 18, now I wear a size 2.”

The founder of eHarmony.com wrote a book recently, Finding Contentment. My favorite was published in 1648, The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment by Jeremiah Burroughs. It is still being published. He said he wrote it for Christians in “sad and sinking times.”

1.) So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let

him do likewise." Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14)

John the Baptist was a preacher of repentance. The first step to being contented is to repent. To update John's answer – Stop the drive to acquire possessions, cultivate the desire to share your possessions. Seek the happiness of cheerfully giving to those who have less than you have. If we are grasping, hoarding, ever wanting more then we despise those who have less. We find reasons to condemn them for their poverty. When we are giving and sharing, we are developing a desire for others to have the same happiness and success that we have had.

Likewise, we must earnestly root out of our work, business, and social ethics those compromises we have made to "get ahead", the little lies and deceits, the cutting corners which we call shrewd and clever. Above all we must cease any means by which we oppress others for our own benefit. I remember a woman saying to me, "Oh, I hate these food stamps. Before they came along, I could get my house cleaned for 50 cents. Now it costs me 15 or 20 dollars."

Why is repentance the first step to contentment? Discontent is sin. As the Shorter Catechism teaches, "The Tenth Commandment (Thou shalt not covet.) requires full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his. The Tenth Commandment forbids all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his."

2.) Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:6-11 NKJV)

This passage brings us to a confrontation between contentment and ambition. How are we to interpret, "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content."? In some nations the people smoke hashish or even opium. In Africa there is a black substance which they chew which has a narcotic effect. These narcotics make the people who use them appear to be contented, but they do not produce Christian contentment.

Does contentment mean to have no ambition? Does it mean to accept things as they are without making any attempt to bring about improvement? No, it means to work as hard as we can, try everything that we think holds promise of success, but then to commit it to the Lord. If He blesses it, it will succeed, we will prosper, and owe God thanksgiving. If He does not bless it, despite all our hard work, we still owe Him thanksgiving. "godliness with contentment is great gain."

The Scriptures teach us the dangers of material riches. God has His people on every level of society. We need to focus on God's will. Where does He need me to be now? Most Christians get trapped into a discontented life by adopting the world's values – more, bigger, best which lead them into the sins of indulgence, greed, and pride. In our society, it is not normal to step down. Once we attain a certain level of income and lifestyle, most will go into debt to maintain that level.

3.) I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11b-13 NKJV)

The late Larry Burkett gave this plan for Christian contentment:

1. Establish a reasonable standard of living based on God's provision, keeping in mind that God will assign Christians at every economic level.

2. Establish a habit of giving. Along with tithing, God would have us provide for needs of others through offerings, gifts, and involvement.

3. Establish priorities. Many Christians are not content – not because they are not doing well, but because others are doing better. Too often Christians look at what they do not have and become dissatisfied, rather than thanking God for what they do have and being content with what He has supplied.

4. Develop a thankful attitude. It is remarkable that we should ever think that God has failed us materially. That attitude is possible only when we allow Satan to convince us to compare ourselves to others. The primary defense against this attitude is to praise God....

Thankfulness is a state of mind, not an accumulation of assets. Until Christians can truly thank God for what they have and be willing to accept God's provision, contentment will never be possible.

5. Reject a fearful spirit.... Dedicated Christians are trapped into hoarding because they fear...retirement, disability, unemployment, economic collapse. Worry makes contentment impossible.

6. Seek God's will. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Philippians 3:8 NKJV)  
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13 NKJV)

