

# CONFRONTING DISCONTENTMENT

## INTRODUCTION

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- We live in a culture that largely encourages discontentment
- The US is one of the most affluent countries in the world...for the most part, everyone in the US has everything they need
- The level of prosperity and materialism in the US have is almost dizzying
- You would think that everyone in a culture like that would be content, happy, satisfied with what they have
- But the exact opposite is true...the contented person is the exception not the rule
- Our culture is rarely content with what it has and the basic tenor of our society is one of dissatisfaction
- We live in an “if only” society....if only I had \_\_\_\_, I would be happy
- Advertising only fuels that discontentment and dissatisfaction by convincing us that our life is empty without that product
- In that kind of culture wants become needs
- Many people are seeking contentment where it cannot be found – money, power, possessions, accomplishments, investments, things, pleasure, relationships, jobs, etc.
- Such pursuits can lead to other vices:
  - The pursuit of thinness can lead to anorexia
  - The pursuit of control can lead to anger when it doesn’t happen
  - The dissatisfaction with reality can lead to “addiction” to alcohol, drugs, cosmetic surgery, pornography
- Believers are not immune to this “secret sin”
- When a culture begins to think and act a certain way, it is only a short time until the church follows
- So it is not surprising that the discontentment and dissatisfaction have afflicted believers as well
- If we are all honest, we all struggle with discontentment to some degree

## THE NATURE OF DISCONTENTMENT

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- Discontentment begins in the heart because it is the heart that is rarely satisfied and content
  - It is an issue of the heart that has plagued us since Genesis 3
  - It is important first to understand how deeply sinful is our discontentment
  - Being discontent is always a sin!
- Satan loves to fish in the waters of a discontented heart – Thomas Watson

### It Springs from a Covetous Heart

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- Underlying the sin of discontentment is the sin of covetousness...covetousness fuels the fires of dissatisfaction
- Covetousness produces a longing to acquire more things, more money, more stuff
- This love of materialism shows itself in many ways...some people love money and find pleasure in hoarding what they have....other love what money can buy and so they continue to buy newer and more expensive things to flaunt their wealth

An encounter early in the career of wealthy oil executive John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) illustrates this attitude. A friend reportedly asked the young Rockefeller how much money he wanted. “A million dollars,” he answered. After Rockefeller earned his first million dollars, his friend asked him again how much more money he wanted. “Another million dollars,” Rockefeller replied.

John MacArthur, *The Power of Integrity*, 128.

- This illustrates the law of diminishing returns: the more we accumulate, the more we want...and the more we want the less satisfied we become
- Hence the many exhortations in Scripture to not love money or things:

**Luke 12:15-21** ~ Then He said to them, “Beware, and be on your guard against every form of greed; for not *even* when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” And He told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years *to come*; take your ease, eat, drink *and* be merry.’” But God said to him, ‘You fool! This *very* night your soul is required of you; and *now* who will own what you have prepared?’ So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

**1 Timothy 6:10, 17** ~ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs...Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

### **It Ignores God’s Promise to Never Give us More Than We Can Handle**

- God will never give us more than we can bear

**1 Corinthians 10:13** ~ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

- Thus, discontentment fails to take God at His promises

### **It Amounts to Complaining Against God’s Plan**

- Discontentment results from a desire to be sovereign thinking our plan for us is better

- Paul Tripp: I love me and have a wonderful plan for my life

- So when things don’t go the way we want, we end up complaining against God
- Doing so essentially communicates that God has made a mistake
- It is really a belief that our present circumstances are wrong and we will only be content when they change to suit our desires

**Job 1:21** ~ He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.” Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

**Philippians 2:14** ~ Do all things without grumbling or disputing

- Discontentment is a sin also because it fails to believe that whatever is happening is God's best for us
- We are promised in the Scripture that God is concerned about our best and whatever He does in our lives He does for the purpose of making us spiritually mature
- This is why being discontent is a serious sin!

## It Constitutes a Failure to Trust God's Sovereignty

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- Discontentment is the opposite of faith
- It amounts to a failure to see God's hand in all of life's circumstances and confident trust in His plans and purposes
- Those who are dissatisfied and discontent in life fail to see that God is always in control of what is happening in life because He is sovereign
- When someone is discontent with their marital situation, job, family situation, or material possessions, they have lost sight of the fact that God is sovereign over those circumstances
- When we say God is sovereign, we mean that God is exercising rule over His creation, including people, to bring about His desired end and to fulfill His purposes
- God is always in control and is always working in and through our lives
- God's sovereignty is only good news in light of God's good character

**Psalm 115:3** ~ But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

**Lamentations 3:37-38** ~ Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded *it*? *Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and ill go forth?

**Daniel 4:34-35** ~ But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven *And among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

**Ephesians 1:11** ~ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will

- Discontent is a sin because it denies the right of God to do with us as he will
- Therefore, to question God's sovereignty and to be discontent with what God has given us is a very serious sin

## BIBLICAL EXHORTATIONS TO CONTENTMENT

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- The Word of God overtly and specifically calls us to contentment

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.

Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, 19.

- The Psalmist frequently speaks about this contentment, referring to it as being "satisfied" in the Lord:

**Psalm 17:15** ~ As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake

**Psalm 63:3-5** ~ Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.

**Psalm 65:4** ~ How blessed is the one whom You choose and bring near *to You* To dwell in Your courts. We will be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple

**Psalm 103:1-5** ~ Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with loving-kindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, *So that* your youth is renewed like the eagle.

**Psalm 107:9** ~ For He has satisfied the thirsty soul, And the hungry soul He has filled with what is good

**Psalm 145:16** ~ You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing

- Even David expressed his satisfaction in the Lord by affirming that He wants nothing outside what God has given him:

**Psalm 23:1** ~ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

- Similar exhortations to contentment pervade the New Testament:

**1 Timothy 6:6, 8** ~ But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment... If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

**Hebrews 13:5** ~ *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"

- Perhaps the greatest example of contentment comes from the apostle Paul

**Philippians 4:10-13** ~ But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. 11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

- Remember where Paul was when he wrote this: in prison chained to Roman guard 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 2 years...he could no longer minister with the freedom he once enjoyed...he was unable to work to support himself...he was dependent on others for his needs...the only contact he had with others was letters from a few churches and an infrequent visitor...the threat of his trial was ever before him
- Yet, notice some principles for Paul's contentment

### 1. He Found Contentment in God's Providential Provision – vs. 10

- Paul knew that God knew exactly what he needed and he trusted the Lord to provide for those needs
- And the Lord did exactly that...He met Paul's needs through the Philippians

### 2. He Learned to Practice Contentment – vs. 11

- The word "content" means "self-sufficient, strong enough to need no aid or support...adequate...not needing assistance"
- This person is contented with their lot...with what they have...satisfied
- This contentment does not come naturally to us but it can be cultivated and learned

• Spurgeon: "Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, it must be cultivated; it will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in us"

### 3. He Practiced Contentment Despite His Circumstances – vs. 11-12

- Paul's contentment was not affected by his circumstances

- His circumstances could not rob him of his joy nor steal from him his contentment

#### 4. He Saw Christ as the Primary Means to Contentment – vs. 13

- Contentment is found in Christ alone, not by removing the problem, getting what you want, stopping a behavior, or feeling better
- This text is often misquoted and used as a proof-text for saying that Christ will help us on our test, get a promotion, etc.
- While those things are true, the context of this text is God’s strength enables us to be content in every circumstance
- Paul was able to adequately face any circumstance because he learned that he could do all things through Him “who strengthens” (*endunamao*= “to put power in”) him
- Christ infuses believers with His strength to sustain them during difficult circumstances and because that is true, they can enjoy contentment
- It was the power of Christ in Paul that gave him contentment

## CULTIVATING CONTENTMENT

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- In light of these biblical instructions, we must boldly and confidently fight against the sin of discontentment
- God has provided the resources that will help us to kill discontent and grow in contentment

### Trust that God is Doing Right Because He is Good and Loving

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- Because God is good and loving, He is always taking care of us
- When we are discontent because we feel like there is something better in this world than what we have, we are essentially saying that God is withholding good from us
- The reality though is that God always does what is right because He is good and all He does is good
- While we think we know what is good for ourselves, God’s plan is the one with the most good
- Coupled with this truth is the fact that God is also loving
- This means that we can trust God is always wielding His control and sovereignty in full knowledge and goodness with love for us
- To be loved by God means God is completely for us and the same love and favor the Father has for Christ is the love and favor the Father has for us
- Thus, we should take comfort and grow in contentment knowing that God is always working in our lives to give us certain things and keep us from certain things because He is good and loves us
- We should also grow in contentment by remembering how God has already worked for our good by giving and withholding things from us in the past
- He’s done what was best for us in the past, is doing what’s best for us now, and will do what is best for us in the future

**Exodus 34:6-8** ~ Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.

**Psalms 84:11** ~ For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly

**Psalm 103:8-14** ~ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness. He will not always strive *with us*, Nor will He keep *His anger* forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are *but* dust.

**1 Corinthians 1:9** ~ God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

## **Trust that God is Perfect in Wisdom and Knowledge**

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- God's sovereignty is always working out what is best because He has all wisdom and knows all things
- He is omniscient....Simply put, God is smarter than us...He knows what He is doing
- His sovereign working in the world is based on His knowing way more than we do (infinitely more) and His infinitely greater wisdom
- Contentment grows when we realize we don't know as much as God and are not as wise as God
- He knows best and is doing what is best, even if we don't like our circumstances

**Isaiah 44:7-8** ~ Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced *it* to you and declared *it*? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any *other* Rock? I know of none.

**Romans 11:33** ~ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

**Hebrews 4:13** ~ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

## **Remember What We Deserve**

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- We deserve wrath, judgment, and an eternity separated from God because of our sin
- Yet, by God's gracious design in Christ, we are exempt from condemnation and are blessed with untold spiritual blessings
- This means God will never treat us how we deserve; instead He treats us as Christ deserves to be treated
- Thus, the smallest good thing we have is far more than we deserve

**Ephesians 1:3** ~ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

**Romans 8:1** ~ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

## **Remember That Worldly Wealth is not True Riches**

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- Our real treasure is in heaven...earthly treasures then should not have the same value!

**Matthew 6:19-21** ~ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

**Philippians 3:20** ~ For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ

**Colossians 3:2** ~ Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.