

The truth about Discontentment

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content”

(Philippians 4:11)

Paul had to teach himself to be content, otherwise he would become discontented. And discontentment often leads to discouragement! The reason that so many of us are discontent most of the time, and even more are discontent some of the time, is that we seek "life satisfaction" from the world instead of from Christ. God paid a dear price to bless us ***"with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"*** (Ephesians 1:3). We were designed to get our needs met through Christ alone. Yet we often seek fulfilment, joy, contentment, peace, self-esteem, and security apart from God. This is a form of rebellion, and the root of all ungodly behaviour – trusting in ourselves instead of Christ. That is why Paul wrote, ***"whatever is not from faith is sin"*** (Romans 14:23). When we seek life from the world instead of from Christ, we grieve God's heart. This will in turn cause us to feel distanced from the Father and become discontent.

Old Testament warnings to Israel about idolatry are similar to New Testament warnings to Christians about loving the world, loving money, and seeking praise from other people. God chose the nation of Israel as His special people. God wanted to reveal His **glory** (His power, goodness, faithfulness, kindness and love), to all peoples through the nation of Israel. But they wanted to be independent of Him. So they were deceived into rebelling against God and living on their own, instead of acknowledging their dependence on God and basking in His blessings. The Bible indicates God's perspective:

Jeremiah 2:11-13 – *"Has a nation changed gods when they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to make for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water."*

What a picture! They chose to dig wells on their own instead of acknowledging their dependence on God, and allowing Him to spring up a fountain of blessings for them. And why were they so bent on doing this? Simply because they had learned to depend on the world system. In the context of the New Testament, **world** does not merely mean things or actions that are evil or wrong in themselves. Loving the world can entail any discontentment related to our personal circumstances. Christ is able to give us complete contentment 'at all times' no matter what our circumstances, but we are often deceived into thinking that, in order to be content, we need something other than Him. Things such as:

- More money. Not a lot more, just enough to have this or do that.
- A "successful" ministry or career
- Prestige
- Power and authority over other people
- Pleasure
- Carnal satisfaction
- Comfort
- A better relationship with our loved ones

- A simpler life - more free time, less hassle
- More control - release from slavery to our job or financial difficulties
- A new and better job
- A business that is simpler, less competitive, or less time consuming
- Release from an oppressor - employer, parent, creditor
- Better health
- Better looking face or body
- Better athletic ability
- Enough assets to retire
- A bigger house
- A better decorated house
- A more prestigious car
- A more reliable car
- Enough savings to cover the cost of future living
- More time with our family
- To live in a different country, state, city, town, or neighbourhood
- Better abilities - to be more successful in school or at work

Note, most of the items on the above list are not bad things; many in fact, are very good. But God wants us to learn to be **content** only through our fellowship with Him in Christ. If nagging desires, even desires for things that seem right and good, keep us from *rejoicing right now*, then we are not **resting** in the Lord.

Day by day, minute by minute, many of you have no more joy and contentment than unbelievers, because you seek it from the same source: your circumstances. If you seek life from the world instead of from Christ, you will "rejoice" only when things are going well; have "peace" (false peace) only when your immediate struggles are gone; and "give thanks" only when God provides the things that you think you need (money, food, good health, etc.). No wonder unbelievers are confused by us. We speak of the peace and joy in knowing Christ but they see us restless, frustrated and discontent. They hear us grumble and complain. And, they watch us chase after the things of the world with as much determination as they do.

So what should we do? First, we must realise and stand firm in your belief that it is God's will for us to be **content** and filled with His joy:

- John 15:11, ***"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."***
- John 16:33, ***"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."***
- Hebrews 13:5, ***"Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have."***
- 1 Peter 1:8, ***"And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."***
- John 10:10, ***"I came that they may have life, and have life more abundantly."***

God would not command us to be content, rejoice always, give thanks in everything, and let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts if doing so were impossible. Believe, then, that God will enable us to live in His will - by the power of Christ in us. Jesus not only provides the joy and contentment, He gives us the power to experience it. The apostle Paul made it clear that the secret to being content in all circumstances is to trust Christ who strengthens us: **Philippians 4:11-13**, *“Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 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. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”*

Note that these two verses mention no human effort to attain contentment and joy. In general, it is easier to believe that joy comes from knowing Jesus, than it is to believe it in **true contentment** (moment by moment). In the thick of each day's difficulties, we are unconsciously deceived into believing that we cannot have **joy**, **peace**, and **inner rest** until the bills are paid, a relationship is fixed, a project is finished, or our direction is settled.

Be aware that the devil is crafty. He won't try to get you to renounce your faith in Christ; he knows you would not do it. Satan only wants to imprison you at that very moment – to lure you into worry, fear, or want (relating to the present circumstances). He works minute by minute. He is not interested in tomorrow if he's got you now! Satan knows, for example, that you'll not agree that joy comes from money. Never! So he tries to trick you into worry, want, or fear over your financial difficulties of today. Therefore, instead of basking at every moment in the **peace** and **rest** you have in Christ, you end up trying to generate peace and rest by removing the current pressures. The futile effort in finding peace and joy through better circumstances, not only keeps you from the real **joy in Christ**, but also keeps your eyes on yourself. And, as long as you are consumed with your own life and circumstances, you are unavailable to God and unable to step into the life He has for you.

Jesus made it clear that the inner peace He gives is not the same *peace* that comes from good or pleasant circumstances in the world. The primary difference is that the world's peace is dependent upon the elimination of problems and difficulties, but the **peace** given by Jesus endures difficulties and stays constant in the midst of adverse circumstances (everyday, every moment), because the **peace** comes from Him - it's His peace, and subject to nothing.

Don't attempt to gain control of your life by concerning yourself over whether you'll have joy and contentment tomorrow, next week, or next year. Just trust God for the moment. Choose to abide in Christ right now! Then take God at His word. Believe that you can have **joy** in His presence. Believe it especially when **joy** seems out of reach. Don't wait until you feel the **joy**. Just choose to believe it. Say that you believe it. Thank God for it. God will do the rest! **Joy** is the antidote to discontentment. When Jesus said, *“I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst” (John 6:35)*, He was not talking about food and water, He was addressing the “emptiness” inside - the want and discontentment that we have in our hearts.

God wants to turn your heart right-side-up and fill it with inexpressible **joy**. He wants to fill your heart with the

joy of Christ. But He wants to do more than simply fill it to the top, and then stop. He wants to keep pouring, so that His joy and love will not only fill you, but flow from you onto other people, so that they also can come to know and experience the **joy** and **love** of Christ. So say “Yes” to God: Ask God to open your eyes to see the various ways you are exchanging His glory for things on earth, resulting in discontentment. Tell God that you want to open your clenched hand and submit all your cares to Him. Start to seek life (security, fulfilment, contentment, control, joy, peace of mind, self esteem, and identity) from the only true source thereof - **Jesus Christ**.

Make up your mind that you will always find satisfaction in Him, and Him alone! For when you are **truly satisfied** you cannot be uneasy, discontented, restless, frustrated, irritated, or disgruntled.