

The Open Secret of Christian Contentment

by J. Glyn Owen

Christian contentment is a settled disposition to regard God's gifts as sufficient and His assignments as appropriate, accepting one's lot in life.

Duration: 45:02

Scripture: Matthew 5:5, Matthew 6:33, John 6:38, Philippians 4:1-13, Colossians 1:19

Topics: "Contentment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of standing firm in one's faith. He highlights that Satan knows the price we demand because we are not content with our Lord, and warns that the devil may offer us that very price to betray our Lord. The speaker also emphasizes the need to know and be satisfied with the greatness and grace of God in order to stand firm. He references the apostle Paul, who wrote the epistle in prison and endured great suffering, yet still found joy in the Lord. The speaker concludes by discussing the importance of contentment and how it enables believers to stand firm in their faith.

Transcript

Will you turn with me in the word of God to the fourth chapter of the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians and we shall read again verses 10 to 13. But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last your care of me hath flourished again. You remember that the Philippians had been a great help to the Apostle Paul.

They had supported him materially more than once. Whilst he went about proclaiming the word of God. Then there had been a long pause.

Now Paul says that has been revived. And so he says, I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last your care of me hath flourished again. Wherein he were also careful, but he lacked opportunity.

The desire was always there, but the opportunity was not given them for some reason or another. Then he goes on. Not that I speak in respect of want, for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

And having learned he says he knows, verse 12. I know, I know both how to be a best and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I am instructed 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. Now this is a very remarkable passage of scripture.

And I have found it exceedingly challenging as I have been meditating upon it with a view to this morning service. The word of God in its totality has its own way of dividing asunder the soul and the spirit. And of piercing and penetrating and of hurting sometimes.

But I find that this passage has its peculiar way of getting right at the raw of our spiritual lives. This crazy rat racing world hardly knows what contentment means. An unholy dissatisfaction seems to have gripped the soul of humanity.

So that it doesn't matter whether we possess a little or much. We always have this crazy, satanic, fiendish discontent. And whatever we have we want more and more and more and more.

But more tragic still. The people of God, the saints of the Lord, the redeemed of the ages. Are often strangers to contentment.

The very bride of Christ is all too often like a discontented wife. Who lusts after every false lover that passes by. And like Israel as described by some of the Old Testament prophets.

Is sniffing in the air for any opportunity of flirting with other gods. And it is all because in our heart of hearts we have never known the glory of our God. We have been blinded to the beauty of the rose of Sharon.

And something has happened to blind us to the fact that our God is the source of every good and perfect gift. And having him though everything else be excluded. We live at the source of every pleasant thing.

It is no wonder therefore that the apostle says that godliness with contentment is great gain. But now what is contentment? I have a little summary here and I want to read it to you before we come to our text. Or rather as an introduction to our text.

What are we talking about? In Christian perspective to be content is not to be indifferent to the lot of the neighbor who is oppressed and unjustly treated. Not to acquiesce in public evil or to tolerate wrongs committed by men against their fellows. It is not to rid oneself of discontent with sin.

Or to be without a deep and dynamic concern for social righteousness. Christian contentment has to do with Christian self-acceptance. An acceptance of God's ministrations as these affect one's station and task in life and also one's resources.

It is therefore a settled disposition to regard God's gifts as sufficient. And his assignments as appropriate. It is in short an acceptance of one's lot in life.

Christian contentment is not a resting on the status quo. It is not as in the spurious contentment of the Buddhist the result of suppressing all desire. Nor is it a stoic apathy rooted in supine resignation to an impersonal and unalterable fate.

It does not exclude aspiration and a concern for improvement. On the contrary, it is that state of mind and heart which arises out of the grace-induced awareness that underneath our lives are the everlasting arms of a Heavenly Father who cares for us and who, if we but obey, will show us every good and needed thing. Contentment is opposed to petulance, self-rejection, despair and panic on the one hand and vaulting ambition on the other.

It excludes envy, avarice and repinings. It is a glad, trustful repose in God and a humble participation in the purposes and dealings of God with his people. What do we know about contentment? There are two things I want us to do this morning.

I want us to look at some of the marks of contentment either in the experience of the Apostle Paul or in his teaching in this particular context. And then I want us to look at the means whereby we may know something of this irrespective of our lot in life. First of all, the marks of the contented man.

Now if you look back with me to this chapter right to the beginning of it you will see that there are a number of features mentioned here that are only practicable insofar as we have known something about contentment. For example, look in verse 2. Paul there commands these Christians to stand fast in the Lord. Or rather, at the end of verse 1, So stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Standing fast, standing firm in the Lord. Now, if you know nothing about contentment you may be tempted to forsake your station in life. Either because of the threat of the cost or because someone else offers you something that is precious to you.

You know why many of us deny our Lord either by lip or by life? It's because we know nothing about contentment. If we have seen the greatness of our Lord and we know Him in all the wonder of His being and all the sufficiency of His provision then you see we can stand fast in Him. We don't want anybody else.

We can let the world go by. But if I have not known the Lord to the point that I am contented with Him oh my, the pull at my heart. Oh, how terrifying the temptations and seductions of the world.

It's very difficult to stand fast in the Lord unless I've learned to be content with Him. When you are contented you do not covet such pleasure or position as God has not deemed wise to give you. Nor are you unduly careful to avoid pain.

If you have your Lord then come pleasure or pain you can do with the one or without the other. The discontented man is afraid to stand firm because his circumstances may change. The discontented man, the man who is discontented with his Lord and therefore with his lot he's open to any bargain.

Dangle thirty pieces of silver before him and you never know what he'll do. He can't stand firm. And the world knows this and Satan knows something of this.

He knows exactly the price that you and I demand because we are not content with our Lord. And one of these days, my friend, don't be surprised if the devil will offer you the very price you ask to betray your Lord. Stand firm.

But you can only stand firm if you know His greatness and you know His grace and are satisfied with Him. Come again, look down the line. Says Paul in verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again I will say rejoice. I hope we are all remembering that this epistle was written in prison and written by a much lacerated man. If you would be allowed the privilege of seeing Paul take off his cloak and bear his back, you would hardly recognize it as the back of a human being.

Read 2 Corinthians 11. And at this moment, as he writes, he is more than probably handcuffed to a jailer. But out of the midst of his circumstances, he says to these men and these women in Philippi, Rejoice in

the Lord.

He says, and again I say to you, Rejoice always, always rejoice. The contented Christian sets a high price on what God has given him, however little. Because God has given it.

God has planned it. God has wisely chosen my lot for me. And I believe that God is wise.

Therefore, the contented man will price anything that God has given and will recognize that what God has withheld, He has wisely withheld. But he has God. And to the contented man, God is greater than everything he possesses.

That is, everything that the man possesses. And God is greater than all. And having God, he is content.

Though he possesses little, he is very grateful. And like Paul, dispossessed of liberty and every semblance of luxury, he rejoices in the Lord himself. Even when he has no luxury in which to rejoice.

It's the Lord who is the source of his joy. It's the Lord who is the center of his life. And therefore he rejoices in the Lord.

You see, the discontented soul cannot be always rejoicing because his circumstances are never stable. The discontented soul can only rejoice when he has what he wants. You know, my friends, you know what I meant when I said that this is a haunting passage.

How often are you and I not in the spirit of praise and of worship for this one reason. We are not contented with our Lord. In other words, we do not know God as God.

As a scum of worldliness that has covered our eyes. We don't see him or recognize him as the all-glorious Father and Friend. Look down the line again.

I'm just mentioning a few things here which throw a tremendous light on this subject. Look again at verse 5. Let all men know your forbearance. It says in the Revised Standard Version.

Or there's a better translation still. And it's not the King James one. It's the New International Version.

Let all men know your gentleness. Matthew Arnold translated it, your sweet reasonableness. Being contented with his Lord and his Lord's choice, whatever it may be, the person of that spirit will not be rough with other people.

He'll be reasonable. He will not bully. He will not always want his own because he's content with what his Lord will bring about.

He hasn't got to bully and hack his way through life and ride roughshod over other people because, you see, his will is to do the will of him that sent him. And he's prepared to receive whatever his Lord will give him. He's satisfied with his Lord's choice.

Whatever the issue, he is sure that his Heavenly Father will not leave or forsake him. And having his Heavenly Father, he is content. Now the discontented man is determined, of course, he must get what he wants because he doesn't know his Lord.

He doesn't know his glory. He doesn't know his wisdom. He doesn't know his power.

He doesn't know his worth. And therefore he cannot worship. Because at the heart of worship there is an acknowledgement of the worth of God.

Though one has naught else beside when one has God, one is at the source of all things needful in this life and beyond it. Come down the line again. Have no anxiety about anything.

Verse 6 But in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known unto God. Out of his contented soul he sees no need to be anxious about anything. Now Paul's imprisoned, I'm reminding you.

Now this man doesn't know what to expect, humanly speaking. He doesn't know what's down the line. He doesn't know what tomorrow will bring.

It may be that tomorrow he will be beheaded. It may be that he will be crucified. It may well be.

Even in prison he refuses to be anxious. And he tells others to whom he writes, Don't be anxious about anything. Why? Because you have the Lord.

And the only thing you need is to explore the grace of your Lord and know the glory of your God. And then you see that you have everything you need in Him. But discontented soul has no such comfort to give.

He can't comfort other people. He has no comfort within himself because he's agitated. He's dissatisfied with his lot.

Though he may actually possess much more than his contented brother, he cannot really comfort his brethren. For his discontent belies any such counsel. And then, of course, to come right to the heart of our text this morning in verses 11 and 12, self-mastering.

I have learned, says the apostle, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased and I know how to abound. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want.

The craving for possession can no more master Paul than the craven fear of need. He is content in the depth of his soul with whatever his Lord will choose for him. He can choose what is right irrespective of reward or threat.

You see, the only free man is the man who is contented with God. When you're contented with God, you can weigh every alternative in the balances and you can do what is right because you're not threatened by the one or enticed by the other. You're not threatened by the threat of pain.

You're not enticed by the possibility of honors or pleasures. When God is the center of your life, when Christ is the center of gravity, then, contented with Him, you can weigh things objectively and dispassionately and choose that which is right. I have learned, says Paul, I didn't discover it myself.

Someone taught me this lesson. And I've learned it and now I know it. And I trust that by the grace of God, out of this prison cell I can show it.

In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Now, there's much more of this in this epistle, but I must come to the other matter that I want to mention this morning, the means whereby Paul's contentment was produced and maintained. Because this is the heart of it.

Merely to look at what contentment means and implies, it just humbles us to the dust. It gives us a sense of our own folly and of our own feebleness and of our own immaturity. And necessary as that may be, let us take a look at the means whereby we may gravitate out of this situation and know something of the same spirit as the apostle.

Now look at what he says. I'm repeating. I can do all things through or rather in Christ who strengthens me.

Now these are words we all know. I don't suppose there's anyone here this morning who hasn't quoted these words at some time or other. Don't we all know them? They're very familiar, but take a look at them, will you? Look at them again as if you've never seen them before.

Try and forget everything you've thought about them. Just come to them in all their simplicity this morning and just look at them falling apart like the petals of a flower, each petal offering something exceedingly precious for you and for me to take with us today. First of all here, Paul affirms his mastery over circumstances.

We've noticed this before, but now let's take it again. Paul says categorically, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Now let's clear this misunderstanding.

Paul is not claiming omnipotence. I can do all things. The context will explain what he means.

He is referring to the ability to accept whatever circumstances God sees fit to prescribe and rather than let any of them hinder the pursuit of God's purpose, to use them to that end. Whatever circumstances God permits, accept them and use them to the glory of God. He says, I can do all things within that context, whether in joy or in sorrow, in plenty or in poverty, in whatever state I may be found, says Paul, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Now this is not to say that Paul was a queer character. This is not to say that Paul was insensitive to being humiliated or arraigned at the bar of justice or that he wasn't sensitive to the privations that he experienced or the imprisonment that was now his lot. Not at all.

Paul was an ordinary man. He was a truly human person. And when in 2 Corinthians 11 he bares his back for the Corinthians to see what a mess his sufferings, his scourgings, and his whippings have made of his physical frame, it is enough, it is adequate for us to know that this man was aware of the ignominy of being counted by the Romans and by the Greeks as the off-scouring of society.

They were not concerned about this man. They would go beyond the limits in scourging with a Roman scourge and in whipping with a Jewish whip. They thought of him as the off-scouring, the filth, the trash.

He was not worthy for you to respect the law in relation to him. Don't worry what you do with this man. We can go beyond the proprieties of the law.

Never mind. And they did exactly that. But the Apostle Paul was never diverted by it.

Suffering never muzzled his mouth. His lips were never hampered from bearing testimony to the Christ in the Scriptures and the cross and the resurrection. Irrespective of all circumstances, he pressed on with the fulfillment of his ministry, the perfection of Christian character, and the directing of his conduct in the way that God would have him live.

He was determined to do what God would call irrespective. And this is his testimony. I can do all things through Christ.

Here is a man, then, here is a man who claims that he can do everything that God requires of him. You know, very often when we read the Bible, when I read it, and I'm no different from you, I'm quite sure of that, and certainly not better. I'm sure you feel sometimes as I do, well, my, this is a tremendous demand.

This standard is unbearably high. I can't be expected to do this. Do you ever talk like that under your tongue? Do you ever say that in your heart? Surely the Lord doesn't expect this as it is said here.

And then one comes back to the apostle's testimony, and then one sees that by the grace of God, here is one man, at any rate, and he's not the only one, here is one man who has discovered the secret of being exactly what God wants him to be. And it was fundamentally because he was contented with his Lord, content with his Lord. He had discovered his Lord to be the source of every needed grace and every needed strength and every needed wisdom and every needed anything else.

You remember how he says in that great eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, after describing all the possible eventualities that could try to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, he comes to this end. He says, in all these things we are more than conquerors. And did you notice, in all these things, not after them.

You know, when the storm is over, we look back upon them and we exaggerate a little of how wonderfully we did. Oh my, we did the right thing there. We said the right thing.

We did exactly what, we simply overcame. We had a wonderful victory, wonderful victory, partly in our own imaginings. But what Paul is saying here is this, in all these things, right in them, in prison, in loneliness, in suffering, in the misunderstandings, in deprivation, in whatever it is, in all these things, we are more than conquerors to him who loved us.

It's the same thing. He claims a total mastery over circumstances. Now how? Paul states the sphere and the source of his sufficiency.

I can do all things in him who strengthens me. The sphere in which Paul found ability to be contented in changing circumstances and in sorrows and sufferings of the order to which we have referred already, the sphere is here designated in these two simple words, in him. I was thinking about that late last evening.

You notice how Paul doesn't mention the Lord here, just as in him. Why doesn't he mention the Lord Jesus? Well, you see, the Philippians knew there was none other. There's no need to mention him here.

The Philippians knew as Paul knew, there is no other, there is no one else that can make a frail man sufficient for all the circumstances of life. It is only in one. Paul doesn't need to spell it out.

It's very obvious, in him. And they were quite sure whom he meant. It was in the blessed Lord of glory.

Now, what's he saying here? In chapter 2, Paul described Jesus Christ as the supremely contented one. That is, as the one who was utterly content with the will of God, whatever that meant. He doesn't use the word.

The ideas are there. Though our Lord Jesus was eternally in fellowship with God and in the form of God, Paul insists that without a whimper of self-pity or the least semblance of self-will, he, to use the words,

emptied himself. He did so freely and contentedly, assuming now, notice, from the form of God, assuming the form of a slave.

Now, there is no greater distance to travel. For one who is a slave owner, a master to become a slave, that's an imponderable leap. But this is imponderably beyond that.

For one who is in the form of God, not just to become a creature, not just to become a man, but to become a slave. And then, says Paul, as a slave, to live a life of sheer obedience to his master, even to the point of being willing to die. And then he says, not simply to die, but to die even the death of the cross.

Now, you see what this means? Jesus didn't whimper. He didn't argue. He said, my meat is to do the will of him that sent me.

This is my bread and butter. This is what I live on. This is my joy.

This is my delight. I delight to do thy will, O my God. Can you see what's happening? It's the contented one.

He came from heaven's glory to the shame of the cross, and he was content and he did not argue. But his satisfaction was to do exactly what his father asked of him. Now, says Paul, I've discovered my own sufficiency by being in him.

I can do all things in Christ. What does that mean? Well, it simply means by being a Christian. A true Christian.

A genuine Christian. You see, Paul's definition of a Christian is a man in Christ. I'm afraid we miss this so often.

Paul doesn't say here, I can do all things because I've had some great spiritual experience after being placed in Christ. He doesn't say that. He says, being in Christ, I have the resources to do everything that God requires of me.

If I'm in Christ, I find everything there. That's all, just being in Christ. He now affirms that his ability to cope with all circumstances was not due to any innate genius, any psychological or spiritual experience of an overwhelming nature, other than this, discovering the resources which are in Christ.

In Christ. Now, the reason I stress that is this, you see. These resources are within the reach of every Christian man and woman in Christ.

See, if Paul had said something like this, I've discovered these amazing powers that God gives me. I've discovered them by fasting for 40, 50 days, or two years, or three, within certain limits. Well, now, only a few of us could manage that kind of life.

Or if I discover these things because God gave me certain gifts, shall we say, to speak with tongues, or healings, or, well, what? Purely illustrative now. If this power had come to me just because I've had a charismatic gift, we would all be aching after the charismatic gifts. But there's not a word about them here.

Now, you good people know that I, at any rate, believe that God does give these gifts. So I'm not disparaging the legitimate gifts of the Spirit from misunderstanding. But it is not in virtue of that that Paul has his sufficiency.

He says, it's just being in Christ. Men and women, let's get a hold of this. It's not a great experience of an overwhelming nature.

It's just being in Christ, that's all. For being in Christ, I have Christ. Like the branches in the vine, I can draw all the resources of the vine, all the sap of the vine, all the life of the vine.

In Christ, we share Christ. And the secret of it is basically here. It's just in Christ.

Well, what does this do, says Paul? He answers the question. Being in him who strengthens me. Being in Christ sets one in the sphere wherein one can share his strength.

Christ is the strengthener of his people. Now, mark the language. Christ did not do the work for Paul.

It wasn't Jesus Christ that was contented in Philippi, Philippi's prison. It was Paul. It wasn't Jesus Christ who bore Paul's lacerations, but Paul.

But what did Christ do then? He strengthened Paul. He made Paul strong so that Paul could bear exactly what God allowed and purposed for him. The Christ who was contented with God's lot in all its vast ramifications and at the costliest price now strengthened his servant because his servant was in him.

His servant was in union with him. His servant had communion with him. And out of that communion with his Lord, the supremely contented one, contentment flowed into the soul of the servant.

My good friends, do we know anything of this? You and I this morning in living touch in union and communion with our Lord, is he through the means of grace in our daily lives and on the Sabbath day, is he really communicating his strength to us? Are we receiving energy and power and grace from him? This is something dynamic, you see. This is being in touch with a living Christ now. He's alive.

And a man in Christ is a man who is in fellowship, sharing life with the risen one. I heard some language used recently that seemed to me to be quite wrong. I've heard people talk about their quiet times as having their batteries recharged.

Now, all right, but that's not what Paul has in mind here. It's not the recharging of a battery, putting something in and then you go in your own strength away from the source of the charge. That's not what we have here.

It's not like the physician giving an injection or giving some vitamins to the sick man. Having devoured the vitamins, he feels a little stronger. It's not that.

What we have here is the union between the Lord and the body, between the head and the body, the bridegroom and the bride, the vine and the branches, and the branches living in union with the vine, Christ the head in life union, and He, the living Lord, infuses His own energy, shares His own grace with His people in part Himself. Now that is why, you see, in so many of Paul's letters we come across words like this. I've no time this morning to go after them.

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Or again, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. In Christ Jesus, in the Lord, it's all there.

It's all there. Jesus Christ is our estate. There's nothing that you and I can possibly need which is outside of Christ.

It's like living on one estate that has got every shop, everything, every provision we can ever need, and all is around us. We've only got to see where we are in Christ. And by the simple faith of a child and a redeemed and rescued sinner, look to Him in faith, trust Him, and discover how great, how full, how merciful He is.

Discover that you are complete. That's what Paul said. You are complete in Him.

If only you recognize Him and if only you let Him reveal Himself to you, says Paul, you're complete in Him. Now then, whence comes our capacity for contentment? Only out of such fellowship with our blessed Lord. That is why the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews can write words like this.

Be content, he says, with such things as you have. Because he has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Hence, we can say confidently, the Lord is my helper.

I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. He has said, I will never leave you. Men and women in Christ, that's the key.

Is He yours? Is the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob and of the Apostle Paul, is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ your God this morning? Have you received Him in Christ? Have you put the arms of faith around Him? Do you say, my Lord and my God. Right. He has said in turn, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Therefore, says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews, now we can say confidently, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear what man can do unto me. I can do all things in Christ.

Oh, strengthen. Lord, teach us to walk in the footmarks of the Apostle and the saints of the ages to the glory of our God and the fulfillment of our ministry. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we are humbled when we come to such a word as this. Very much so. And we acknowledge our discontent.

Sometimes there are but occasional outbursts that come occasionally. At other times, we are given to periods of discontent. And because of it, we are no witnesses, though we bear witness.

We belie the word we proclaim and the profession we make. Forgive us, we pray. Forgive us for the impression that we have given to men, rightly or wrongly, that the source of our joy is material.

And we have prized material things far more than the possession of him in whom all the fullness dwells. Forgive us, we pray. And out of a sense of being forgiven, may we know the sweetness and the sufficiency which is held out for us in the promises of these passages.

Our God, help us, help us to be able to say in our hearts what the apostle said. Not to boast in ourselves, but at the same time to boast in him. I can do all things in Christ.

Make our life one long period of experimenting upon the grace and the sufficiency of our Lord. So abide with us and so minister to us grace that having met in thy presence today, we shall be enriched and ennobled and thereafter enabled to go out other than we were when we came in. In the knowledge that in Christ we have all things and abound.

Hear us, O Lord, our God. And we would ascribe unto thee all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/1/SID1764.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-glyn-owen/the-open-secret-of-christian-contentment/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net