

Contentment

Why We Are Not Content

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Words convey meanings to us. What thoughts come into your mind when you hear words like soft, and majestic, racy, Hitler, Vietnam, radiant, gentle, beautiful, kind, thoughtful, young, energetic, and so forth? They all convey to our mind something of the past that just puts a picture there.

Now *soft* could be a big white fleecy cloud, or a to a little child, a nestling against its mother's breast. *Beautiful* could be a memory of one's wife when he was first courting her, and how she is still beautiful to him to this day. *Courageous* could be how a wife views her husband as he goes to work every day to support the family, though it is difficult for him and very trying. Of course the words *funny* and *hilarious* could bring back some thought to our mind of something really cute or that really just tickled our fancy.

But if I were to give you the word *content* or *contented* or *contentment*, what thought or what word would come to your mind? What picture would you associate that with?

Far back in the 1930s when I was only in the single digits, Carnation had a commercial on "contented cows," and whenever I hear the word "contented," I think of cows. As I remember, the commercial went something like:

Don't you hear the bell?
The cows are in the dell.
Wait, wait, wait
By the garden gate.

Of course the theme behind the song was that Carnation cows were so contented that the milk they gave was absolutely delicious. I do not know what relaxed contented milk would be like, but nevertheless that was the picture that I had, and when I think of "contentment," I think of a big Guernsey cow in a green pasture, chewing its cud, with blue sky and white fleecy clouds overhead.

When my wife and I drive to the Ontario Airport from Anaheim, through the Southern California Dairy Preserve, we do not see green grass. It is very rare. Usually the cows are kept in some manure enclosed pasture, and they eat straw. I think I would rather have my picture of the cows anyway.

I do not know what went through your mind when you heard the word *contentment*. Perhaps it was a farm, with you and your family in green pastures, and crops coming in, and your kids playing out on the front lawn. Maybe that is what you pictured contentment as being. Or maybe it was something meaningful at work where you really accomplished something special that you were proud of, and you felt would really help the company and mankind. You came home feeling good about that.

Maybe for you wives it was that you had enough to feed your family, and to have the knowledge that your children were safe and free from harm, and this made you feel very contented. Perhaps it was being on vacation up where the pine trees are, with you sitting on your cabin porch, and the evening breeze coming in with a sweet smell. The pine trees sort of just do things to you, and the kids are having a ball. For those who are older, it might be sufficiency of funds. It might be food. It might be

shelter and help. That would be your picture of contentment, coupled with your family and friends around you.

We do not live in a world that pictures *contentment* as one of the benefits of it. We live in a world that features discontent. Crime is a constant threat. Loss of a job is a distinct possibility because companies are not content. They are not content with their size, or with their profits, or with their image, so they buy each other out and lay off employees. Nuclear conflict is constantly on the horizon as a possibility, coupled with germ warfare. These things are always in the back of our mind, and this does not produce contentment.

We worry about having enough money to purchase a home. We are worried about having enough to retire on. We are worried about the Y2K problem which is probably very real. We worry about the Common Market starting in January. We worry about the stock market. We worry about our health. We are concerned about the wrong morals that we see in leadership and how it affects our children, with what they have to put up with, and in fact, what *we* have to put up with. We have a lot of concerns, and it goes on and on. If we spend too much time with this, we can really relate to the phrase, "Stop the world, I want to get off!" But we cannot. We are stuck here.

As for us in the church, we were facing all of the above, and felt secure as a large body banded together in the Worldwide Church of God. But now with God's scattering of His church, we find ourselves in small groups or in large groups that are starting to come apart, and even content with it being banded together has been taken away from us. What on earth is God doing? What is going on? Why am I not contented? Why am I restless?

Here is the definition of the word *content*:

1. Not inclined to complain or desire something else, satisfied
2. Submissive to circumstances, resigned, accepting.
3. Freedom from worry or from unsatisfied desires; peace of mind; satisfaction.

Discontent is just the opposite. Its definition is: lack of contentment, dissatisfaction, restlessness, uneasiness of mind, as though frustrated and dissatisfied.

We have an opportunity from the physical standpoint to bring a lot of contentment into our lives. We have the power to promote a degree of it. Whenever we solve physical problems that produce discontentment, we are contented in the area where the problem is concerned. With our budget, if we control our outgo and it does not surpass our income, then in a sense we are contented with our financial circumstances. Concerning retirement, if when we are steadily planning to lay aside fifty dollars a month or whatever the amount toward our retirement, then we are not concerned too much. We have done the best we can. Certainly it may not be there when we retire, but at least we were planning for it, so we are contented in that area.

Concerning our children, if the family lives by right rules and structure and teaches the children properly, then we will not have child rearing problems, and that will not be a source of discontent.

Concerning our marriage, when we work at our marriage, when husbands love wives, and wives love husbands, and they work to make their home right before God, then any discontentment that would come from that would disappear, because we have done our best to make it correct.

The last area I put here is work. If we are having problems on our job and we work to do the very best we can, and we work to get ahead and honor the people who are over us, and work as if we are working for Jesus Christ, then any work problems we had should disappear.

If we conduct ourselves wisely in all the physical areas of our lives, then we will have physical and mental contentment in those areas. Of course this takes discipline in planning and consistency in carrying out those plans.

Now God gives us some principles to consider as to being contented. Let us turn to Proverbs 15, verses 16 and 17. God really wants us to put the right things first. He wants us to have the right priorities.

Proverbs 15:16 Better is little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure and trouble.

He says it is better to have your home in the fear of God, to be conducting yourselves wisely, than in a sense to forget God and go after great treasure, because the more treasure you go after, the less you are going to be focusing on your family and on God. So, better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble and strife.

Proverbs 15:17 Better is a dinner of herbs [vegetables] where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred.

Well, better is a dinner of vegetables where love is, than a fatted calf, one that has been raised on grain that you can eat. It is the same principle. What he is saying here is that there are more benefits from the fear of God than from having great wealth, and that is true, great wealth with anxiety and turmoil that destroys tranquility. The fear of God produces peace and a right way of life, whereas the desire for great wealth draws one away from God.

One commentator said: "The more possessions, the more anxiety." That is just exactly how it went. Concerning verse 17, he said, "the focus here is on the benefit of happiness." What do you want in your life? Misery or happiness? "A happy loving relationship is more desirable than living in wealth and having sumptuous meals where strife, hatred, and continuing anger dwell. The desire for wealth often replaces the desire for your family, because you get caught up in it. The ideal would be to have a loving family and good food, but short of that, a humble meal is preferable."

What about spiritual contentment? For us brethren, the beginning of spiritual contentment is obedience to God. Let us turn back to Deuteronomy 30. In all the chaos and confusion that we have today, we have to choose to obey God, no matter what the circumstances are. God gives us a choice, and we have to make the choice to obey Him.

Deuteronomy 30:15 "See, I have set before you this day life and good [one choice] and death and evil."

This could be rendered, "I have set before you contentment, and I have set before you discontentment."

Deuteronomy 30:16-20 "In that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witness today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life, and the length of your days."

Now let us go to I Samuel 15 just to nail this down. This is where Saul came back and he did not kill all the animals that God ordered him to do.

I Samuel 15:20-23 And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." So Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from being king."

The first step toward contentment in God's church is certainly obedience to God.

Now we will go to III John 2. We will start to see some priorities here.

III John 2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

It might seem here that prospering and having health was more important, but John did not mean that prospering and having health was more important than having godly character. The way that should read is, "In every respect, I hope all is going well with you, as does your spiritual growth."

You see, again this is showing that living rightly before God is what is important to us, towards spiritual contentment. The focus always has to be on God and overcoming.

Now let us look at some where this focus was not maintained. The problem here was that the servants of God were working for others, or they were slaves, and some were talking about going on strike. This was the wrong approach.

I Timothy 6:1-2 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine not be

blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

He is saying when you work for someone, do not be rebellious. Treat your employer as if you were working for Jesus Christ, and being that you carry the name of God, set the right example by working completely for them.

I Timothy 6:3-4 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, reviling, evil suspicions.

What he is saying here is that these people who were teaching otherwise were going to produce discord. They were saying, "Let's go on strike." "Make them pay you more money." It was that type of attitude, and they were causing problems. They had a desire to debate everything and to bring everything into question.

I Timothy 6:5 Useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

I am going to read Albert Barnes' comment on this.

Supposing that gain is godliness, that which contributes to the increase of property is of course true religion, for in that it is proper to infer that any course which contributes to worldly prosperity must be sanctioned by religion. They judge the consistency of any course with religion by its tendency to promote our word prosperity.

In other words, if somebody gets rich from what they are doing, then God must be in it. That is their attitude. I think we would say it today that *the end justifies the means*, that whatever we do to get rich, "eh, it's okay. God will approve of it."

I Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

Godliness should be regarded as the most valuable asset that we can obtain without a doubt, and with contentment, with a calm state of mind satisfy, free from murmuring and complaining. The sense is that godliness, coupled with a mind that is at peace, despite the trials that come upon it, can be regarded as the real gain.

Another way of saying this would be that godliness is great riches if a man be content with what he has. The true riches we ought to seek is the mind of God, His character, coupled with contentment. This is what we should be after.

I Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

I could not help but think of King Solomon back in Ecclesiastes 12. At the end of his life he said, "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity." He said that he had this great kingdom and he would have to give it away to somebody who would not know how to begin to understand how to work with it. He said

that it was all vanity. I find that as I get older that the physical things that I thought were so important are no longer that important, because it is godly character that we have to have. When we reach the end of our lives, brethren, it is godly character that we take with us, and not material things.

I Timothy 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Turn now to Proverbs 30 because there is a principle there that I would like to have us all understand. I looked into the translation a little bit this time, and it just helped me more.

Proverbs 30:7-8 Two things have I request of You (deprive me not before I die):
Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me
with the food allotted [that you prescribe] to me.

It says "convenient" here, but it is "what you prescribed, God, for me. It may not necessarily be what I want, but what You prescribe."

Proverbs 30:9 Lest I be full, and deny You, and say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be
poor and steal, and profane the name of my God.

He does not mean he is swearing. What he means is that he is called a Christian, and for him to steal would be taking God's name in vain.

Now go to I Timothy 6:9:

I Timothy 6:9-10 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 evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their
greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

This applies to us.

I Timothy 6:11 But you, O man [and woman] of God, flee these things and pursue
righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.

This is what we are to follow after.

I Timothy 6:12-14 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you
were also called and have confessed the good confession before many witnesses. I urge
you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who
witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment. . .

What commandment? "To flee these things and to follow after righteousness, godly faith, love and
patience and meekness."

I Timothy 6:14 That you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our
Lord Jesus Christ's appearing.

This is where you get contentment and the mind of God. There is probably no better example of
contentment under trial than in the life of Paul. Turn over to Philippians 4.

Philippians 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at the last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.

Paul is referring to the care he received when he was in want. He thanked the Lord. He said, "I rejoiced in the Lord." He rejoiced in God, seeing that the care came to him. The problem was not that they did not want to care for him, but the problem was a lack of communication. They did not understand the need.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.

Paul said he learned to be content. That is the key word, learned. It is something we have to *learn*. Paul was no doubt often in terrible need, and yet he does not comment on it because his focus all through his converted life was to work with the church, to help the people come before God. That was his focus. He suffered a great deal, as we are going to see. He learned how to bear up under his own physical trials so they did not give him uneasiness of mind. It is something he had to learn.

Philippians 4:11 For I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.

That is, to have a contented mind. Paul states he had to learn this. I keep saying this over and over again. This contentment does not come naturally, and Paul had the same nature we do, where he wanted things solved instantly, where he could be off the hook. But the life he was forced to live, the experiences he was forced to go through, produced something else in him. It produced a different mindset and a different understanding, and it is a mindset and an understanding that we have to learn, brethren, and develop.

From the beginning of God's dealings with Paul, he was on a roller coaster ride till the day of his death. We have never had to do that. Paul never knew from one day to other what was going to happen to him.

It all started in Acts 9. Here Paul was going along. I do not know that he was enjoying his life, but he felt that he was doing the right thing, and he was logically pleased in his own mind. Then all of a sudden God was going to deal with him.

Acts 9:1-5 Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

It is going to be hard for you, Saul.

Acts 9:6 So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

His life had been changed from the routine that he appreciated and in which he felt comfortable and contented, to one now that was desperate.

Acts 9:6-9 Then the Lord said to him, "Arise, and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

You talk about being discontented.

Acts 9:10-16 Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Arise, and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for, behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

We have Paul now here being anointed. The scales fall off his eyes, and he goes before the brethren, and they are scared. They do not want him. He starts to preach, and he gets stronger and stronger.

Acts 9:23-26 Now after many days were past, the Jews [his friends in the past who were all for him] plotted to kill him. But their plot became known to Saul. And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a large basket. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.

They did not want to take him in. They were afraid of him. There was no contentment here. So we see that Paul had a difficult time. It was a terrible start. It was a start that just rattled his cage tremendously.

Now turn to II Corinthians 11 and we will begin to see some of the trials that Paul went through, and still he says that he is content. The problem here was that other ministers in Corinth wanted to take over the church. They were puffed up and they were loud, and they were saying how wonderful they were in their oratory and in their knowledge, and it had put Paul on the defensive, and he was going to have to boast. But what was he going to boast about?

II Corinthians 11:17-19 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!

So Paul was going to boast. He did not want to boast because everybody else was boasting, but he felt that he had to. He said, "Receive me as a fool if you have to, and bear with me as you do the others. Consider how much I've been provoked to this, and how necessary it is to my character. Do not reject and despise me, but because I'm constrained to say that of myself which is used to regard as foolish boasting." He said he may boast a little, because everybody else was boasting so much.

II Corinthians 11:17 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord.

He means this is not what Jesus Christ did, but he wanted to talk about himself. He said, "I recognize the folly of boasting, but because of my office and my responsibility, I have to take the stand to convince you of who I am."

II Corinthians 11:18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.

He said that these false teachers boast of rank and of their natural abilities and their eloquence. He said, "I'll boast of my abilities, which though somewhat different, pertain to the flesh." He said they were different because he was not going to talk of his rank or of his birth or of his abilities, but he was going to talk about what he suffered of the Lord. That is what he's going to talk about.

II Corinthians 11:20-24 For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. To our shame I say we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

He received 196 stripes across his back.

II Corinthians 11:25-32 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned [and left for dead]; three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen [who wanted to kill me], in perils by the Gentiles, in perils in the city [crime in the street], in perils in the wilderness [robbery], in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil [in having to provide for his own living and serve the church], in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—beside the other things, what which comes upon me daily: the concern for all the churches [the responsibility of taking care of the churches]. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation [with what they do to God's people]? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. [I am telling the truth. This is what I have gone through.] In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me.

Paul was let down over the wall by night. This is what the apostle Paul had to go through, brethren. None of us had to remotely go through what Paul has gone through. Yet in all the trials and suffering, Paul said that he had learned to be content. Let us turn to Philippians 4 and see again how Paul was able to do it.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard of need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.

Now what did Paul learn? Paul had many trials. In all these he had time to meditate and think, and in that meditation he learned to be content. What did he have to learn? He learned that Jesus Christ was

always with him, and that it was wrong to complain about the state he was in, because he said in I Corinthians 10:11 not to complain and murmur, and it was wrong to be impatient, because it did not serve any purpose.

This does not mean that we should not work at correcting problems we find ourselves in. When Paul was shipwrecked in the ocean, he swam. When we have problems, we have to work at them. We have to do what God says.

Philippians 4:12 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.

Paul said, "I don't care where I am, I have contentment." He learned how to conduct himself in prosperity, and he learned how to conduct himself in privation. He learned what it was like to be well taken care of, and to exert restraint. And he learned what it was like to be in want and to yet not murmur and complain.

Barnes Notes: He had learned to bear all this without discontent. This was then, as it is now, no easy lesson to learn, and it is not improper to suppose when Paul says that he had been instructed, in this even he means to say that it was only by degrees that he acquired it.

This did not come overnight. There was no magic bullet.

It is a lesson that we slowly learn, not to murmur at the lot of providence, not to be envious at the prosperity of others, and not to meditate morbidly when our comforts are removed.

Barnes went on to say that Paul's lot could be up one day and down the next. Paul had to get used to changing circumstances. It is with these sudden changes that we have problems. It is with these sudden changes that we have to focus on God.

Men get accustomed to the even tenor of life, no matter what it is, and learn to shape their temper and their calculations according to it. These lessons of philosophy vanish when they pass suddenly from one extreme to the another and find that their condition in life has suddenly changed. The garment that was adapted to the weather of a uniform temperature, whether hot or cold, fails to be fitted to our wants when these transitions from one to the other take place. It often happens that the grace that would have been sufficient for either, continued prosperity or adversity, will fail in the transition from one to the other.

In other words if you are wealthy, and you go down to poverty, then all of a sudden God is not there. And if you go from poverty up to great wealth, you have tremendous problems. You see, it is the transition that hurts us. He went on to say that these transitions, these trials produce godly character in us. He brought up the aspect of the diamond, that how under heat and great pressure the sand is formed into a diamond. And we are the same.

In verse 13 Paul gets on to the reasons for his confidence.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

From the experiences of his life, these taught Paul that Christ was with him through every facet of his life, and through extreme dangers he could bear any trial, perform any duty, suffer any adversity, live in prosperity, live in want, and do anything, because Christ was with him. Needless to say, Paul was with Christ. Because of Paul's many experiences he had learned to trust God, and this is going to bring us to the next point.

Paul learned it was not his strength, his ability to work, his money, or his power that saw him through trials, it was the strength of God that did it, and it was by this means that Paul was able to accomplish what he did. We must understand that this applies to us as well. The absolute key to being content is having faith in God and in His great power.

There was one thing that I wanted to say about Paul in relation to Abraham. Abraham knew he was going to have to sacrifice Isaac. He trusted God, and he looked down and knew that God had the power to resurrect Isaac if he sacrificed him, or that God will stop the sacrifice, because he knew God had promised that his seed would cover the earth. So Abraham went on. Well Paul did the same thing. He added up all his experiences. He looked back over his life, and he said that God had always been with him and had never let him fail. So this was what gave him the confidence.

Romans 4:17 As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations. . .

This is God speaking, before it ever happened. He said that He had decided to do this, that Abraham was going to be a father of many nations.

Romans 4:17 As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations, in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did . . .

God said that He was going to do this, and Abraham believed God, even though his and Sarah's bodies were in advanced years for childbearing.

Romans 4:18-20 . . . who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he might become the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promises of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, . . .

Abraham knew God could do what He promised, and Abraham was content.

Romans 4:21-25 . . . and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our offenses, and was raised for our justification.

Now Abraham had been worked with by God, and Abraham knew that he was of great value to God, that God loved him and that God was going to be with him. Brethren, we had better realize that we

are of great value to God as well. We may not think much of ourselves, but we are the pearl of great price that the merchant Jesus Christ gave His life for, that we might be redeemed. That should be great encouragement to us.

Romans 5:1-3 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance.

We have access to God now. We have access to His mind. We have access, we have entrance made for us to the Kingdom of God if we persist, and that should be encouraging to each one of us.

Romans 5:5-6 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

"Christ died for the *ungodly*." Christ died for the ungodly—John Reid. You can put your name in there as well, because you have sinned as well, and God died for you.

Romans 5:7-9 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

What God is trying to get across here is that if He died for us and gave His life for us while we were sinners, and while we were His enemies, what is He going to do for us now that we belong to Him, now that we are His friends? This should give you great encouragement and great contentment that God is on your side and that He will not fail you.

What are the lessons that we are to learn from this?

1. We do not have to collapse under any trial, because God is with us and He has full knowledge of where we are.
2. We do not have to yield to temptation. God has told us in I Corinthians 10:13 that He will not try us above what we are able. He can rebuke Satan, and we can pick up our bodies and take them out of the danger area.
3. We can command that the wrong thoughts leave us. We just have to do it. We have to rebuke the wrong thought and rebuke Satan.
4. We do not need to fear what is on the horizon. We have to be as wise as we can, but in all of this we have to trust God.

Now Paul was content with the knowledge that God was working through him, for God's glory, and to serve God's people, and for Paul's growth and preparation for the Kingdom of God. In all of this Paul was content.

In this society, everyone wants a silver bullet to take care of whatever problems we have and to make all the trials depart and make everything well. I know that when I am in a trial, I want the trial over quickly. If the weak side of my nature had its way, I would want God to put me in a cocoon and set me on a shelf till the kingdom came, and then bring me out, and that would be nice. But it would not do any good for God and it would not do any good for me.

Well, I pray for you. I want your life mended, everyone of you. I want everyone healed, and I want all those hurting financially to have those situations turned around. Of course then there would be no growth and no glorifying God and no understanding of what others are going through, and no godly character whatsoever. If God gave me what I wanted, I would be of no use to God as well, even though my intent towards you for you to have all your problems solved and your health restored. If God answered all my prayers in that fashion, you would not grow and you would not build character, and you would be of no use to God in His Kingdom, and neither would I.

Brethren, I have to get this through my mind, and my sweet wife keeps telling me that this is not the time that we are to receive our rewards. This is the time that we are to go to school, and this life, with all its problems, is the school ground that we have been placed in, we have to deal with it. We have been selected by God to learn what it is like to be God, and from John's sermon we have discovered that by the means of God's Spirit, He is putting His mind in us, that we might learn to use it.

We are going to have to go through experiences where we have to use God's mind to make proper decisions. We have to learn to make these proper decisions now, because if we do not we will not be able to make them in the Kingdom of God. When we get into the Kingdom of God there is going to be no magic button to be pushed and all of a sudden we have all wisdom. We have to learn now not to lean on our own understanding, but to use the mind of God and lean on His understanding. We are to have on-the-job training here and now, and we will be able to put that training into practice in the world tomorrow.

Jesus Christ, who is the King of kings and the Lord of lords, had to go through the same training, but because of His supreme office, His training was commensurate with His ability and the responsibility that was to be His, and it was exceedingly difficult.

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

Albert Barnes commentary on the above verse:

The meaning of the preposition here rendered for, [the suffering of death] should read, on account of the suffering of death, or in virtue of that, He was crowned with glory and honor. His crowning was the result of condescension and suffering. It does not mean here, as our translation would seem to imply, that He was made a little lower than angels in order to suffer death, but as a reward for suffering death, was raised up to the right hand and crowned with glory and honor.

Now to put this in some more simple language, He finished the course He was to follow. He did the job that was set before Him. He finished the job He was to do; therefore He was crowned with glory and honor. This is what is being said. He did this by the grace of God, or He did this because it was

God's purpose set for Him to accomplish, and we too have purposes to accomplish. It was set for Him to save mankind by sacrificing Himself for us, and He completed the objective set before Him by living a perfect life and becoming a perfect sacrifice.

Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

It means "complete" through sufferings, i.e., to render Him wholly qualified for His work, that He should be the Savior, adapted to redeem men. It did not mean that He had sinned or that He was not perfect in every way. It meant that through His sufferings, His experiences, He was fitted for the job. There was a completeness of filling up in Jesus Christ which was necessary to His character to be our Savior. In all of this and all the trials, Jesus Christ was content.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him . . .

Believe me, going to the cross was *not* joyful, but yet He looked past that. You can see in Psalm 22 where He was under tremendous torture, and all of a sudden His mind shifted, and He said, "When I'm in the Kingdom of God I'm going to preach and do this and thus, and such and such." You can just see the mind set change. That is where Jesus had His mind, and He was content with what God was doing with Him.

Hebrews 12:2 . . . who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

He finished the course that God sent Him to do. In I Peter 2:23 it tells that when He went to the stake and the men put Him on it, He did not fight back. He could have called legions of angels, but He put Himself in the hand of His Father who judges righteously. He trusted God for what He had to have done. In that placing, He had the complete trust of His Father who would do only what was completely right for Him. Even though He did not want it, it gave Him contentment.

I Peter 2:23 Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

How does all this apply to us? Well brethren, just as Jesus, through His suffering, was rendered wholly qualified for His future work, we must understand that we are being rendered perfect for the work God has in store for us. The understanding that God is working with us and loving us should comfort us and help us to be content with what God is doing in each of our lives.

Turn now to II Corinthians 12. The apostle Paul probably bordered on sheer genius. He had visions, he had been with Christ. Paul was gifted with so many gifts. He had a mind and had understanding that could easily have caused him to rely on himself and to become puffed up. One commentator said, "He that is closest to God is in the greatest danger." He did not mean that we should not be close to God. He meant, "He that seems to have it altogether, faces the danger of becoming puffed up." Of course we can read of that in I Corinthians 10:12. "He that stands, take heed, lest you fall." Paul was in that category, and he knew that pride was a great destroyer, and so we read:

II Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Nobody knows exactly what that thorn was. Some think it was his eyesight, because in one of his letters he says, "See this is my own hand. See how largely I've written." I do not know what it was and I do not know that anybody else does either.

II Corinthians 12:8-10 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Now to Paul, the answer "My grace is sufficient for you," is a better answer than of the removing of the affliction, because Christ's answer to Paul was that He would support Him, that He would be his strength, that He would not fail him, and Paul was assured that Christ would be with him throughout any trial, that Jesus was going to be his strength. This is made evident by the fact that when we are healthy, when we are beautiful, when we are strong, when we have money, and I do not care if we pray and study, we tend not to need God.

But I will tell you, let us get down, let us get our mortality threatened, and we get on our knees immediately, because we have to have Him. This is what Paul is talking about. When we are helpless and when we are swallowed up by insurmountable problems then we really need God, and as one commentator said, "We are best when we are weak, because we have to rely on God."

Psalms 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.

Another way of saying this is: "Before I was humbled, I wandered away from what was right, and since I was afflicted, I recognized how far I slipped. And now I keep Your word."

In II Corinthians 12:10, Paul was saying that he counted it a privilege to be afflicted, if by that means the power of Jesus Christ will rest on him, that the strength of God may rest on him to accomplish what he needed.

The reason Paul was content was he knew, based on this and his experiences, that he would not lose from the affliction, that he knew in fact that he would gain from the trial. He knew that God would see that he would grow in character and in experience and in faith toward God from the affliction.

Barnes Notes on verse 10:

Since so many benefits result from trials, since my afflictions are the occasion of attaining the favor of Christ in so eminent a degree, I rejoice in the privilege of suffering.

Boy! That is hard to come by. That is hard to think that when I am weak, I am strong, that when I feel weak, when I am subject to trial and the nature faints and fails, then the strength is imparted to me,

and I will be able to bear it all. The more I am borne down by the trial, the more I can feel my need for divine assistance. This is what God wants us to take in as well.

Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, brings out the many heroes who were in trial, who out of weakness were made strong, because they had to draw close to God and rely on Him.

We have a very fine lady out here on the West Coast, and I will not mention her name. She is up in her eighties, about 85, and she has cancer of the colon and she has a very bad heart, and people go to comfort her all the time. They come away being lifted up, because she is so strong. She has worn out several Hospice nurses. They keep expecting her to die, but God keeps on keeping her alive. I would like to see her healed, and all of us would. She does suffer and she does get weak. One day I said, "I'm just really sorry that you have to suffer this way," and she said, "Stop! God has me exactly where He wants me. If He can work with me and teach me this way, then this is exactly where I want to be." She was content.

We have someone else who is suffering a difficult disease, and he works with that. Even though he works with it, and even though it is on his mind, he serves the brethren all the time. His focus is not on his infirmity. He is just like the apostle Paul, and so is she. Even through their trials, they focus on the brethren. Paul pointed them toward God, and so do these two. This is just an example in our own midst of people who are suffering, having trials, but they are perfectly confident that God knows where they are, and they are not discouraged.

Brethren, Christian contentment is not passive, but active. I want to make this point. Sometimes we can view contentment in the light of complacency, to sit back and let God do it. *Complacent* means self-satisfaction, contented like the cows in the pasture. We should never take the attitude, to just sit back waiting for God to make us wealthy. We should never just lay back and take our marriage for granted, or just trust that our children will somehow grow up to be wonderful children. Some in the past have said, "I've paid my tithes. God said He'd bless me. Where is it?" There is more to it than this. You are supposed to build character.

If we want a better standard of living, then you have to work at being diligent at your work, or preparing yourself educationally. If we are going to have a happy marriage, then both parties have to work at it and apply the principles of God. If we want our children to be properly trained, then we have to plan time and have patience to train them. If we are to be in good health we must eat properly and exercise to the best of our ability. If we are to have the mind of God working in our lives, then we have to pray, study, fast, and meditate. We cannot lean on our own understanding, but obey as we come to understand what God is teaching us. If we are to overcome, then we have to follow the example of Paul in I Corinthians 9.

I Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it [the prize].

Paul said, "You've been called. Run to receive the prize. I don't care whether you're flat on your back, sick, or if you're wealthy, or whatever you are, you were called to run."

I Corinthians 9:25 And everyone who strives for the prize is temperate in all things.

You must have self-control in all things. That is work.

I Corinthians 9:25-27 Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus; not with uncertainty. Thus I fight; not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

You cannot be in this Christian life and be contented to just sit there. You have to work at it.

Philippians 3:4-5 Though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee.

He was wonderful by the world's standards.

Philippians 3:6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Which one of us can say that?

Philippians 3:7-15 But what things were gain to me, these I counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things but 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 [nothing], that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead [the kingdom of God]. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind.

This is what we are to do as well. Let me just say this, that in everything we strive for, and everything we do, we have to apply the command found in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." Changing your nature to the nature of God, and all these things—the food, the increase in salary from your efforts, the right family, the right marriage, your raiment, your house—it will all be added to you, but *you must seek God first in everything*. This is our focus, who have been called in this end time. The word *seek* means to strive humbly and sincerely to follow and obey.

God wants us to be content. The contentment that God wants us to have is not the contentment of cows being in a beautiful pasture with blue sky and white clouds, chewing their cud, eating green grass. That is not it. It is not the vision of a pastoral scene that would take one's breath away. It is not living high up in the mountains among the trees. It is not living in the city where your friends are. It is not living on the coast where the ocean thunders into the shore. It is not physical wealth. It is not beauty. It is not strength. It is not any of these things.

Our contentment comes from our relationship with God and believing on His promises. That is where our contentment comes from. God's promises to us are great and they bring us tremendous contentment.

I Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The fact that Jesus Christ is the firstborn of many brethren is our hope. He was resurrected, and we are called to be joint heirs with Him.

I Peter 1:4-5 To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

That should just about make your hair stand up.

I Peter 1:6-9 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved through various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it be tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

What a wonderful promise that is for us! God wants us to be content with the fact that He is working with us, and that He is working with each and every one of us in whatever circumstances we are in. He has not gone off somewhere. God wants us to have peace in the knowledge that He is protecting us, that we might rule effectively in the Kingdom of God. God wants us to have complete faith in His Word.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

We have heard that for years. All the things that we are going through work together for good.

Romans 8:29 For whom he foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

The "many brethren" is us.

Romans 8:30-33 Moreover whom he did predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies.

What a wonder set of Scriptures!

This does not mean that we will not become afraid when trials hit us, because we do, whenever our mortality is touched. The first thing that comes in is, "Where am I going?" "What's happening?" "Something's wrong with me." Fear sets in. This is because we are mortal and we can be greatly dismayed at some of the things we face. But even here God wants us to know that He will never leave us.

One of the scriptures I like is II Chronicles 16:9 that says that God's eyes rove over the earth, to and fro, to see who He can be strong for. This is encouraging to me. Now of this next scripture, I always think of Richard Ritenbaugh, because he brought something out about this one time and it just stuck in my mind.

Hebrews 13:5-6 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you."

Our conduct is to be without covetousness, and we are to be content, and let what we have be sufficient for us. Why? Because God says, "I will be with you. I will be your reward. I will supply your needs." That is what God is saying. You do not have to worry about it.

Regarding this "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," Adam Clark spells this out in a very literal fashion, and it reads: "I will not leave you, No, neither will I not utterly forsake you." That reads very awkwardly, but put into English that we can understand it reads, "I will never leave you. Not I. I will never, never, never, never cast you off." That should bring us contentment.

Well brethren, we have spent a great deal of time looking at the life of Paul, and I want to conclude with the scripture in Philippians 4 with the advice that he gave to the Philippian church, that they might have peace and contentment.

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious [be discontented] for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication [earnest prayer, deeply imploring God], with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Give thanks for the calling that we have been given and the family of wonderful people that we have been placed into. It may not come instantly, but if you persist, God will bring you peace. Paul then gives some good advice to those who live in this end time.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there be anything praiseworthy, think on these things.

What he is saying is, "Fill you mind with right things, encouraging things. It's going to help and encourage you."

Philippians 4:9 Those things, which you have both learned and received and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Brethren, if we do this, then we, like the Apostle Paul, will be able to say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."