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Teaching Notes

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## **Christian Contentment BFL 2018: Week 10**

### **Contentment and Suffering ... and..**

### **Contentment is NOT Complacency**

Paul

*Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who strengthens me.*

Jeremiah Burroughs

**Definition:** Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

**Last week:** Contentment and Marriage

**This week:** Contentment and Suffering ... and... Contentment is NOT Complacency

I. Contentment is Hardest to Attain and Most Valuable in Suffering

Q: Why do you contentment in the midst of suffering is very valuable? How does it glorify God? How does it help the sufferer? How does it help other onlooking Christians? How does it advance the gospel?

A. Contentment is forged most powerfully in the pressures and fires of suffering

Google: "How are real diamonds formed?"

A:

1. Bury carbon dioxide 100 miles into Earth.

2. Heat to about 2,200 degrees Fahrenheit.
3. Squeeze under pressure of 725,000 pounds per square inch.
4. Quickly rush towards Earth's surface to cool.

So also Christian character is formed most powerfully in times of suffering:

***James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

***2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.***

Paul is asserting that the trials of our lives are "light and momentary."

Q: What do these words mean to you?

Notice earlier in the chapter, he described these trials:

***2 Corinthians 4:8-12 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.***

Q: In verse 17, what is Paul saying these light and momentary trials are working in us? How do earthly trials prepare us for eternal glory?

Q: How can such a perspective help us to face trials well? How can they help us maintain a "sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit that freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition"?

## II. Imitating the Faith of Heroes

### A. Christian Contentment is a Combination of Factual and Experiential Learning

1. Factual: we need to know from scripture what it means to be content
2. Experiential: we have to live through “any and every situation” to grow in contentment
3. We need ROLE MODELS to help us... scripture is full of old examples of godliness in a wide variety of circumstances

***Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.***

Q: What does Paul say is a purpose of scripture in this very?

Q: How does reading the story of suffering saints in the past give us hope?

Q: What is the relationship between hope and Christian contentment?

### B. Hebrews 11: The “Hall of Faith”... shows both remarkable successes and remarkable sufferings

***Hebrews 11:32-38 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. <sup>36</sup> Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- <sup>38</sup> the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.***

Q: What variety of outcomes do you see in this passage? How do some of the faith-filled people “succeed” in their earthly outcomes? And how do you see apparent “failure” in some of these earthly outcomes?

Q: Do you see a kind of “continental divide” in verse 35 as the author moves from apparent “success” to apparent “failure” or tragedy? How does the life of faith function in each case?

### C. Church History full of Heroes who Suffered Well

1. Tertullian: “The blood of martyrs is seed for the church”

**Felicitas** a widow, and her seven sons were charged with being Christians. She had done a great deal of good for the poor in her city, and was well-known as a follower of Jesus Christ. When the Roman prefect tried to persuade her, first with promises then with threats, to abandon her faith in Christ, she answered that he was wasting his time: “While I live I shall defeat you; and if you kill me, I shall defeat you all the more.” Each of her seven sons were called in and threatened with death, but they all stood firm for Christ. The record of the trial was sent to the Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who ordered that they each be put to death in various parts of the city, probably to appease various pagan gods.

**Forty Martyrs Of Sebaste** These forty soldiers, all Christians, were members of the famed Twelfth Legion of Rome’s imperial army, serving Rome in Sebaste in modern-day Turkey). One day their captain told them Emperor Licinius had sent out an edict that all soldiers were to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. These Christians replied, “You can have our armor and even our bodies, but our heart’s allegiance belongs to Jesus Christ.” It was midwinter of A.D. 320, and the captain had them marched onto a nearby frozen lake. He stripped them of their clothes and said they would either die or renounce Christ. Throughout the night these men huddled together singing their song, “Forty martyrs for Christ.” One by one the temperature took its toll and they fell to the ice.

At last there was only one man left. He lost courage and stumbled to the shore, where he renounced Christ. The officer of the guards had been watching all this. Unknown to the others, he had secretly come to believe in Christ. When he saw this last man break rank, he walked out onto the ice, threw off his clothes, and confessed that he also was a Christian. When the sun rose the next morning, there were forty bodies of soldiers who had fought to the death for Christ.

**Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley:** Protestant martyrs during the reign of Roman Catholic tyrant, Queen Mary; they were burned at the stake on October 16, 1555. Latimer said to Ridley,

“Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.”

Q: How is the evident supernatural hope of these martyrs essential to their witness to onlookers? How does it relate to Christian contentment?

2. Others have endured less extreme sufferings with remarkable cheerfulness and peace:

An as-yet unconverted and legalistic John Wesley and the Moravians (whom he called “the Germans”) during a severe storm at sea:

At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour. Of their humility they had given a continual proof, by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired, and would receive no pay, saying, “it was good for their proud hearts,” and “their loving Saviour had done more for them.” And every day had given them occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the Spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge. In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, “Was you not afraid?” He answered, “I thank God, no.” I asked, “But were not your women and children afraid?” He replied, mildly, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.”

From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbours, and pointed out to them the difference in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not. At twelve the wind fell. This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.

Q: How did the Christian contentment of these Moravians have a lasting impact on John Wesley?

3. Remember the earlier examples of Sarah Edwards and George Mueller in their stable contentment at the time of the death of their beloved spouses

What shall I say: A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod, and lay our hands on our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness that we had him so long. But my God lives; and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband, and your father, has left to us! We are all given to God: and there I am and love to be. Your ever affectionate mother, Sarah Edwards.

### III. Answering the Charges of a Rage-Filled World

- A. The Onlooking World Uses the Existence of Human Suffering in this World as a Major Proof that God Doesn't Exist

"If a good and powerful God exists, he would not allow pointless evil, but because there is so much unjustifiable pointless evil in the world, the traditional good and powerful God could not exist." [Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*]

- B. Keller's Initial Observation

Keller points out that the flaw in that thinking is the arrogance in humans being so confident in their judgments: "If our minds can't plumb the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, well, then, there can't be any!"

Keller says of them: "This is blind faith of a high order."

- C. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

1. The basic problem his book sought to answer was:

"If God were good, he would make his creatures perfectly happy; and if he were almighty, he would be able to do as he wished. But his creatures are not perfectly happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both."

### IV. "Why, O Lord?"

- A. The Immediate Question that Erupts from Our Tortured Hearts: "WHY, O LORD???"

***Psalm 10:1 Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?***

***Psalm 88:14 Why, O LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?***

***Job 3:20 Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul?***

“Why, O Lord? Why did you do this?” Why did you take my little boy? Why didn’t you heal my wife? Why didn’t you protect our home from the hurricane? Why did my daughter die in the car crash, and the drunk driver walked away without a scratch?

B. Providence Teaches Us: You’ve Brought the Question to the Right Place!!

***Ephesians 1:11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will***

Joseph to his brothers:

***Genesis 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.***

Everything that happens in this world is ultimately from God... God ordains it, so it is right to ask God:

***Job 1:21 The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.***

C. James Teaches Us: God Wants Us to Ask Him!

***James 1:2-8 Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. <sup>5</sup> If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. <sup>6</sup> But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup> That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; <sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.***

D. So... three initial answers to the WHY, O LORD question:

1. God is working his purpose out for his glory and the salvation of all his elect

***Romans 8:28-30 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God***

*foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

The Blood of Martyrs and the Tears of Saints build the church... no advance of the gospel without suffering

## 2. A megaphone to get our attention to WEAN US FROM EARTHLY IDOLS

- a. In order to wean us from the sinfully inadequate views of happiness that our flesh pursues, God must use pain as his most powerful tool

C.S. Lewis: "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

- b. But... WHAT does God whisper to us in our pleasures? WHAT does God speak in our conscience? WHAT does God shout in our pains? Is it not this:

*Isaiah 45:22 "Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

*Leviticus 26:12 I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.*

*Psalm 16:11 you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

God alone can satisfy us... no earthly blessing can take his place!

- c. Amazing that God is humble enough to take us back after we have run after all these earthly pleasures, and only when stripped of them would we turn back to him:

C.S. Lewis: "If God were proud He would hardly have us on such terms: but He is not proud, He stoops to conquer, He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to Him, and come to Him because there is 'nothing better' now to be had." [The Problem of Pain]

Like the Prodigal Son:

*Luke 15:16-19 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have*

*sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'*

Like Hosea and Gomer... or really, God and Israel... or ultimately, Christ and US!!!

*Hosea 2:6-10 Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. <sup>7</sup> She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.'<sup>8</sup> She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold-- which they used for Baal. <sup>9</sup> "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. <sup>10</sup> So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands.*

d. In other words... we are all idolaters and tend to give up our idols only when pain and suffering causes us to run back crying to God

3. As James 1 says, all affliction builds character in Christ... apart from the suffering, we will not grow to spiritual maturity... see above!

## V. God and Christ Suffered to Bring Eternal Redemption

### A. We Should Never Forget: God Suffered Too... in Christ

*Mark 14:33-36 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch." <sup>35</sup> Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. <sup>36</sup> "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."*

*Matthew 27:51 The earth shook and the rocks split.*

*Luke 23:44-45 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> for the sun stopped shining.*

The cross was immeasurable anguish for both the Father and the Son

### B. God is Compassionate to Our Suffering

**Exodus 2:23-25** *During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.*

**Exodus 34:6** *And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness"*

**John 11:33-35** *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. <sup>34</sup> "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.*

## VI. The Pain and Tears Are Real

Joseph said "GOD MEANT IT FOR GOOD..." but there was a high cost:

**Genesis 37:32-35** *They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe." <sup>33</sup> He recognized it and said, "It is my son's robe! Some ferocious animal has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces." <sup>34</sup> Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. <sup>35</sup> All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.*

**Genesis 40:23 - 41:1** *The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him. When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream*

**Genesis 43:30** *Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.*

**Genesis 46:29** *Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.*

## VII. Fighting for Contentment as Never Before

A. Times of suffering are extreme tests...

B. At that time, you will need to fight for contentment as never before

Especially difficult is the chronic nature of the suffering... it goes on far longer than we ever thought... we can be content on Monday, and not so much on

Tuesday as we grieve the death of a loved one, or battle chronic illness, or wait on God in infertility, or wait for God to provide a job

C. We will talk more next week about how to fight for contentment

### VIII. Seven Meditations/Prayers to Help Sufferers Conquer

1. God, You Are My Mighty King, and I am Your Humble Servant:
2. God, You Are My Tender and Compassionate Father:
3. God, You Are My Very Great and Eternal Treasure
4. God, I Must Kiss the Rod and Cover My Mouth
5. Jesus, You Are With Me as I Walk through the Fire
6. God, You Are Fitting Me for Heaven
7. God, You Have Put Me On a Lampstand

### **Contentment is NOT Complacency**

#### I. Christianity a Raging Fire that Burns Against the Status Quo

Biblical Christianity is a relentless force, a raging inferno of drive and desire that God be glorified in every corner of his creation. It exists in a universe presently at war, a divided and scattered creation ripped apart by evil. The devil led the way in the revolt against a holy God, and we humans joined in his rebellion. The resulting curse has made all of creation groan under the chains of bondage to decay. Our own souls cry out against our sinfulness, saying "What a wretched creature I am! Who will rescue me from this bondage to death?"

The status quo belongs to the devil. It is intolerable to allow any evil at all in God's universe, and the more someone grows in Christ, the more passionate will be their commitment to see God's name hallowed and his will done on earth as it is in heaven. "Our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29), and his Holy Spirit works to kindle a like holy flame in the hearts of his people.

How then does the peace and joy and holy resignation that comprise Christian contentment coexist with such a raging inferno? It seems incongruous, unfitting for a Christian ever to relax, to be at peace, quiet, resting under God's mighty hand.

#### A. Wycliffe Bible Translator's Statement

"Honestly, I never thought that contentment was something we should strive for in a lost and dying world."

#### II. The Spider's Numbing Sting

#### III. Never Be Lacking in Zeal

***Romans 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.***

***Revelation 3:15-16 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth.***

#### IV. Zeal for Holiness

***Phiippians. 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.***

***1 Corinthians 9:24-27 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. <sup>25</sup> Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. <sup>27</sup> No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.***

#### V. Zeal for the Advance of Christ's Kingdom, and the Salvation of Souls

***Acts 20:22-24 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup> I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup> However, I consider***

*my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

Hudson Taylor: On Sunday, June 25th, 1865, **unable to bear the sight** of a congregation of a thousand or more Christian people rejoicing in their own security, while millions were perishing for lack of knowledge, I wandered out on the sands alone, **in great spiritual agony**; and there the Lord conquered my unbelief, and I surrendered myself to God for this service. I told him that all the responsibility as to issues and consequences must rest with Him; that as his servant, it was mine to obey and to follow Him — his, to direct, to care for, and to guide me and those who might labor with me. Need I say that peace at once flowed into my burdened heart? There and then I asked him for twenty-four fellow-workers, two for each of eleven inland provinces which were without a missionary, and two for Mongolia; and writing the petition on the margin of the Bible I had with me, I returned home with a heart enjoying rest such as it had been a stranger to for months.