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January 2018

THE SECRET TO CONTENTMENT

Greetings in the Name of our Glorious Father, His Glorified Son, and the Spirit of Glory Himself!

We pray that this edition of our Living Logos newsletter finds you enjoying all the benefits of the awesome salvation that we have freely received through our Beloved Savior!

This month, I want to get right into the message that I believe the Lord has for us because I have much to say on this particular topic...

This Living Logos' teaching is what I believe to be one of the most life-changing teachings that you could ever hear. Unfortunately, I learned this lesson the hard way and I believe when you hear it, you will find that you too have occasionally fallen subject to this condition as well. So, this month, I am going to talk to you about true biblical contentment.

Now this might not seem like the most exciting message to you, but I believe that if you will really hear my heart (and the heart of God), applying these biblical principles to your life, you will experience such a wonderful peace and satisfaction that no one or nothing can ever take away.

Let's begin by looking at the Book of Philippians to see what the Apostle Paul said regarding this topic of contentment...

WHAT IS CONTENTMENT?

In Philippians chapter four, Paul was taking the time to show his gratitude to the Church of Philippi for their financial and material support. But in verses 11-13, he pauses to make a point that we would do good to take heed to ourselves.

He begins by saying in verse eleven, *"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content."*

By making this statement "not that I speak in regard to need," Paul was clarifying to them that his contentment was not based on the offering that the Philippians had sent to him. He did not want to give them the impression that their provision was the source of his joy that he repeatedly mentioned throughout this letter. He wanted them to understand that he was truly content before he received their gifts.

Then he went on to explain this by saying "for I have learned..." This phrase is extremely important to understand because the supernatural contentment that he possessed was not something that just came upon him by accident. No, **consistent and unwavering "contentment" is something that is learned!**

You see, contentment is not a state of being; it is a state of mind! That means that you have to learn to be content in your situations and circumstances just like a child has to learn that they are not always going to get their way in life. This is what the Apostle Paul had to learn and this is exactly what each of us will have to learn as well: Your circumstances are not to dictate your contentment; you are to learn (i.e. to be trained) to be content despite your circumstances!

So, what does it mean to be "content"? How do we define "contentment"? The word "content" literally means "to be satisfied and independent of circumstances" or "to be self-sufficient (or in our case, Christ-sufficient)." So, Paul had learned to be satisfied despite his circumstances. He had learned to live a Christ-dependent life where the difficult things that happened to him did not steal his joy because his contentment was in Christ. You could say, **Paul was less dependent on his circumstances because he was more dependent on Christ!** (We will see this more clearly later in this teaching)

Now I feel that I need to say this lest I be misunderstood: While I believe that we must learn to be content as we are taught here, I am not referring to being a doormat for the devil either. For instance, some things that come into our lives are inspired by satan and his cohorts. Therefore, if we adopt the attitude of being content during these demonically inspired attacks and do not actively resist him, then he will just walk all over us. No, we must resist the things that are brought into our lives by the devil! No, what I am referring to by this term “contentment” is our attitude as it pertains to these undesirable circumstances.

You see, if we lose our joy over a negative situation that comes into our life, then we are failing to be content. However, this contentment that Paul was referring to is not having any ambition or desiring something better for ourselves. These desires to grow and excel are natural and God-given; but at the same time, we are not to become so dissatisfied with our current state that it is negatively affecting us emotionally. Paul goes on to explain this further in verse twelve...

INDEPENDENT OF CIRCUMSTANCES

He went on to say in 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.” In this verse, the Apostle Paul explains the extent of his circumstances...

In the first part of verse twelve he said, “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound”... The word “abased” means “to make low or to be humble.” You could say that it is living a lower-standard of life. The word “abound” means “to overflow and to live in prosperity.” So, by his own testimony, Paul was saying that he knew what it was like to experience both abundant prosperity and abject poverty. But in the midst of all of this, he never let his circumstances affect his joy because he put his hope in the Lord and not in his financial situation. We would do good to learn this as well.

He then said, “everywhere and in all things, I have learned to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”... Here, Paul was saying that he had experienced both ends of the totem pole of life in general- which included “everywhere and in all things!” That means that wherever he went and whatever he did, he had highs and lows. We too can experience good times and bad times in any situation. It is inevitable. We can count on having the highs and lows in anything we do and everywhere we go because, as Jesus promised us, in the world we will tribulation (John 16:33). There will be times of happiness and bliss and there will be times of sorrow and grief. So, if this is to be expected, then we are going to have to learn to be content no matter what our circumstances are in order to live a life of consistent joy.

Allow me now to paraphrase verse twelve: In essence, Paul was saying, “I know how to both live in abundant prosperity and abject poverty. In every place I have been and in every situation, I have learned to live free from my circumstances, having my stomach full and having my stomach empty, having all my needs and desires met and seemingly having none of them met.” Now that, my friends, is the epidemic of having fluctuating circumstances, isn’t it? Yet Paul maintained a life of joy and contentment in the midst of the most extreme of circumstances.

But again, Paul had learned something! As a matter of fact, the Greek word used for “learned” in verse twelve is a different word than the one used back in verse eleven. This word means “to be initiated into a secret.” Paul had, through his experiences of poverty and prosperity, learned to live independent of his circumstances because he had been initiated into the secret of contentment. Amen!

So, would you also like to be initiated into the secret of contentment? Then we need look no further than verse thirteen where this mystery is revealed!

THE SECRET TO CONTENTMENT

In Philippians 4:13, Paul went on to give us one of those truths that many Christians love to quote and post on their wall. He said, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

I just love the Amplified Bible’s translation of this verse. It says, “I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me: I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency].”

Now this is a very popular verse and every one of us probably thinks we know what it means, but the important thing to understand here is that, in order to see what Paul was referring to here, we have to keep this verse in context. As we have already seen, Paul was speaking of the wide range of circumstances he had experienced and how he had learned to be content in them. Therefore, he was attributing all the things he could do through Christ to him learning to be content in all things. In other words, **the reason that the great Apostle Paul could be content in his difficult circumstances was because Christ Jesus gave him the strength to be content!** Amen!

So, we could flip this truth around and see another reason for discontentment in our lives: We will become discontent in all things if we are not drawing the necessary resources from Christ to be content. Amen? You see, if we are not abiding in Him- letting the spiritual strength that comes through Him to flow into us- then our natural response will be to attempt to draw those resources from other things. That is such an important truth to understand, my friend.

You see, we are all looking for happiness and if we do not put ourselves in the position to receive it directly from God, then we will automatically try and get it from something or someone else. That is just the way we are built. For example, many people simply cannot be alone. They have to be around friends or a significant other at every waking moment. Most of the time, the reason for this discontentment, is because they are not satisfying that part of themselves by having a healthy relationship with the Lord. The same principle can apply to other things as well. A lot of times we can become physically tired because we are not resting spiritually. We can have physical cravings because our spirit is malnourished. Sometimes our natural state is a reflection of our spiritual condition. If we do not let the Lord become our source for everything, then our joy, happiness and contentment will be based on whether or not we have all of these other things.

As a matter of fact, the word “content” also describes “that which is contained.” This shows us an invaluable truth- that our contentment is based on what we already have contained within us. In other words, in order for a Christian to be content in all circumstances he or she must learn to live from the inside-out, and not from the outside-in. If we learn to draw from the spiritual resources that we have contained on the inside of us, then we can become consistently joyful. Amen.

THE MISSING PIECE TO THE PUZZLE

I like to look at it this way: Every one of us has been created like a puzzle, and there is one large piece right in the middle of us (our heart) that only one thing will fit. And that one missing piece can only be fulfilled by Jesus Christ! He is the only thing that can complete the puzzle of our lives. Amen?

You see, the world tries to cram everything from sex, drugs, success, and family into that void, but none of those things can totally fulfill them. Sure, they might have some temporary happiness when they gratify those lusts for natural things, but it does not bring them that everlasting contentment that I am talking about.

But the truth is, this is not just true for the world: Even believers can digress in their Christian walk to where they attempt to satisfy themselves with the things of this world instead of through their personal relationship with the Lord. I am not saying that those who do this have lost their relationship with Jesus altogether; I am simply saying that we can walk in the flesh like the world, and when we do, our desires will be for natural and carnal things above spiritual things. In other words, when we walk in the flesh, like those who do not know God, we will try and fulfill ourselves through relationships, recreational activities, financial success, etc.

I have found in my own personal life that when I have walked in the flesh, my heart has gravitated to things other than the Lord. For example, at one point when I allowed myself to become distracted from the things of God, I turned to the game of golf to try and fulfill that inner hunger for joy and peace. Now, I did not exactly know what I was doing at the time; I just allowed that void back in my heart through not making the things of God my priority and was seeking that contentment in something else. I would find myself playing golf every spare moment I had, and when I did not play well, it would affect me emotionally. Why would I let my poor play disturb me so much? It was because it was far too important to me. I was trying to fulfill myself through this hobby, so when it was not working out too well, it robbed me of my joy.

But, thank God, there was a time after this, that I could go play a round of golf and because I had the Lord back on the throne of my heart where He was supposed to be, I did not get upset when I did not play well. That's right, it did not seem to affect me the way that it did when I was not abiding in Him. And why? It was because I was content through Christ! I was simply satisfied with the presence of the Lord that surrounded me once again. I was fulfilled and my joy was full, which nothing, including my "sub-par" golf game could steal! Amen.

Now I know that might be a petty example to some of you, but I use it to illustrate how even small, insignificant things like our hobbies can become idols in our hearts- thus being the source of our happiness and contentment.

Another example I can use from early in my Christian life that most of us can better relate to is relationships: During these early days, where I was walking in the flesh more than in the Spirit, one of the main things that I tried to fulfill that void with was with other people. For example, when I was abiding in the Lord and He had preeminence in my heart, I did not have to be on the phone talking to someone all of the time. I did not need to be hanging out with my friends and family constantly. The reason was because my relationship with God was where it needed to be, so I was not trying to fulfill myself with these natural relationships. I was simply content in the acceptance and goodness of my Lord and did not have to have the acceptance of my friends, co-workers or family.

Not only that, but I was also content with my single life. I was not driven to find a "significant other" because I lived in the reality that I already had my "Significant Other," and that was Jesus. This was all because my focus was on the Lord and not on the opposite sex. I was simply content with my relationship with Him and was truly willing to wait on the Lord to bring my wife to me! (And, thank God, He did!)

Now, don't misunderstand me: I am not saying that if you have desires for anything in this world other than the Lord that you are not abiding in Him. I am just saying that if you are truly abiding in Him then those desires for natural, carnal things will not steal your joy and you will not be bent on finding fulfillment through them. Your contentment will be found solely in your relationship with Jesus, and you simply be satisfied! Nothing more and nothing less!

But the truth is, when we are abiding in Christ and He is abiding in us, the ups and downs of this life will not dictate our joy. We will not feel like we have to have something more or something better to be happy because we know that we are right in the middle of God's perfect will for our lives which is in communion with Him. Therefore, if Jesus is on the throne of our heart, unfulfilled desires for these natural things will not rob us of our joy because our joy is found in the Lord.

ABUNDANTLY SATISFIED

So, let's wrap up this month's teaching by taking a look at a powerful passage of Scripture out of the 36th Psalm that talks about this blessed state of contentment & satisfaction...

In verse eight, David begins by saying, "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of your house..."

The "they" being referred to here are those who know their God and, therefore, position themselves under the shadow of His wings (see verse seven). So, what does he say is the benefit of drawing near to Him like this? They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of the house of God.

How would you like to experience this kind of abundant satisfaction? Apparently, the way to do so is in the fullness of God's house. So, the question we need to ask is: what is the house of God? To the Jews under the Old Covenant, the term "house of God" was synonymous with the "presence of God." In other words, when the Jews thought of the house of God such as the tabernacle or the temple, they equated that with God's presence because that is where God was understood to dwell.

Therefore, the way David says that we become abundantly satisfied (or you could say, extremely content) is by entering the fullness of God's presence. This, of course, corresponds with Paul's secret to contentment that we found in Philippians 4:13- for our contentment level is directly tied to abiding in the presence of the Lord. Amen?

We see this principle reflected in Psalm 16:11 as well when King David said, "In Your presence is fullness of joy." So, it sounds like the key to being full of joy and abundantly satisfied in our hearts is learning to live in the fullness of God's presence. Or you could say, the more of the Lord's presence that we are abiding in, the more content and satisfied we will be. Amen.

Saints, there is no substitute for His presence, saints! It brings fullness of joy, contentment and satisfaction. Therefore, the only reason that we ever become discontent in life is because we are not drawing the strength for our contentment from the presence of Christ. Yes, if we ever feel like we need anything other than Christ, then we are showing signs that our heart is gravitating towards these other things and away from the Lord.

The rest of Psalm 36:8 goes on to say, "...and you give them drink from the river of your pleasures."

Didn't Jesus say that if anyone thirsts, let them come to Him and drink (John 7:37)? You see, true satisfaction comes from nowhere else other than being close to Him and drinking from His well of salvation. He alone can satisfy our deepest needs- not a spouse, a job, or a hobby- just as water is the only thing that can satisfy us when we truly thirst. There is no substitute for Christ in this dry and thirsty land just like there is no substitute for water in a naturally dry and thirsty land.

Then notice what King David says in verse nine: "For with You is the fountain of life; In your light we see light."

David goes on to say here that it is only being with Him (that is, in His presence) that you and I can experience the fountain of life. What is this fountain of life? It is God Himself- for He referred to Himself as the fountain of living waters (Jeremiah 2:13). So, when we are "with Him," the life of God can continuously flow through our very being making us perpetually satisfied and content.

David also said that in His light we see light. In other words, when we are in His presence (for God Himself is light), we can see more clearly and our perspective will change. The things we used to think were important and that we had to have will no longer be our priority and focus. That's right- in His presence we will be able to see what is important with an unclouded perspective and will truly walk in the light as He is in the light.

My friend, there are so many benefits to the presence of God in our lives. Like we have just seen, it produces light and it is our fountain of life. Yes, His presence is to us spiritually what sunlight and water are to us physically.

This has been something that the Lord has constantly communicated to me throughout my Christian walk- the importance of living in fellowship with Him and in His presence.

Early in my walk with God, when I would take everything from struggles with my flesh to desires to grow before the Lord, it seemed as though the only response I would get from Him was- "You need to be spending more time with Me."

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It was during this season that He was teaching me about the importance of my fellowship with Him. He pointed me to the truth that spending time with Him and in His presence, is where we exchange our weaknesses for His strength. It is where we become spiritually strong. It is where we find the fulfillment, the peace and the joy that we desire. Yes, times spent in simple fellowship with the Lord is where most of our answers are found, and that certainly includes joy.

The Apostle John made this point in chapter one of his first epistle. In verses 3-4, he says, "that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full."

Notice that he refers to this fellowship with the Father and the Lord Jesus and then says that these things were written to us that our joy may be full. Therefore, our fellowship with God the Father and God the Son is evidently a big factor in experiencing the fullness of joy. Amen?

Other translations of 1 John 1:3 describe this fellowship that the Apostle John referred to as "relationship" and "communion," and this is precisely what the word used to translate fellowship means. It comes from the Greek word koinonia which describes "communion, fellowship, relationship, partnership or sharing." The Amplified Bible describes this fellowship with the Godhead as "a distinguishing mark of born-again believers." In other words, having this relationship, communion and fellowship with God is what Christianity is all about.

Never forget: Christianity is not another religion; Christianity is a relationship with God. Therefore, if we do not fulfill our primary purpose- which is this fellowship with Him- then do you think we might lack some of the basic things that our heart yearns for like joy? Sure, we will. This is exactly why John then said in verse 4 that these things he was writing to us was in order for our joy to be full. In other words, if we do not apply this foundation of fellowship with God, then our joy will not be able to reach its full potential. Sure, we might be able to experience some joy from time to time by following other biblical principles, but having our joy full comes through having an active, living relationship with God. Amen?

So, let me reiterate the point I have been making in this newsletter: we do not need anything or anybody to be happy; all we need is fellowship with Jesus. He is the secret to being completely content, abundantly satisfied and full of joy. Amen!

So, the message in this Living Logos is evident: Learn to draw your strength and satisfaction from pursuing a relationship with Christ. Know that if you ever feel you have to have anything other than His presence and those wanton desires are causing you to lose your joy and peace, you need to check the condition of your fellowship with the Lord. Plug into your power source through spending time with the Lord and watch how abundantly satisfied you become. You will be able to say as Paul did, "I have learned the secret to being content; the secret is found in Christ! He is truly all I need!"

Till next month... Maranatha!

Victoriously,

