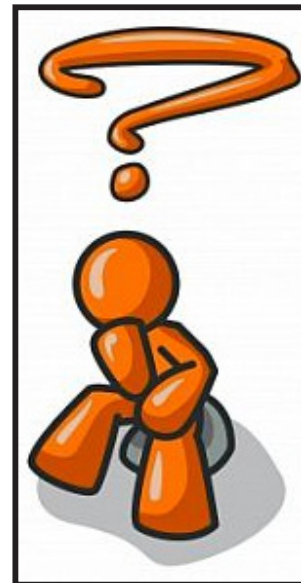


What About ... Contentment

By CLARK BLANCHARD

One of the great legacies which both my wife and I received from our parents was that they were people who knew contentment. In some ways, this is surprising, considering that they experienced two world wars, the Great Depression, the Korean and Vietnam wars, plus numerous personal tragedies. My dictionary says that to be “content” simply means “to be satisfied with what one is or has; not wanting more or anything else.” This should not be confused with “complacent” which means “being pleased, especially with oneself or one’s advantages or one’s accomplishments, often unaware or unconcerned with some defect.”

Four times the New Testament exhorts us, by command or example, to be content (Luke 3:14; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 4:11-12; and Hebrews 13:5). But **what about** ... all those many passages which seem to command the opposite? For example, starting right with salvation itself, an unsaved person is not to be content in that state. *Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3). A new Christian is not to be content as a spiritual infant. *Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation* (1 Peter 2:2). And clearly, believers are not to be content with the lost people around them ... *He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be*



reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:19b-20). We could add many more examples. So **what about** this apparent contradictory biblical teaching regarding contentment?

As in all interpretation of Scripture, the context, especially the immediate context, gives us the right answer.

1. **Luke 3:14**—*And some soldiers were questioning him (John the Baptist), ... and he said to them, “Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse anyone falsely, and be content with your wages.”* In response to the preaching of John the Baptist, some Roman soldiers asked him how they could put his message to practical use. His answer was that they were to be content with their wages, even though soldiering, in their situation, might very well include financial gain through force or fraud. Contentment had to do with their material (wages) situation.
2. **2 Corinthians 12:10**—*Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.* Here Paul discussed his *thorn in the flesh* (verse 7) and that God’s grace was sufficient for all the bad stuff Paul experienced. In that context, Paul was content to endure whatever God sent his way, for Christ’s sake (verse 10).

3. **Philippians 4:11-12**—*Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.* Here Paul testified that he learned to be content regardless of his material status—humble means or prosperous. His secret is given in verse 13, *I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*
4. **Hebrews 13:5**—*Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.”* Here, again, the subject is material contentment because the Lord will never forsake us.

So, in summary, the biblical teaching is that we are to be content in:

- **Those situational circumstances in which the Lord has put us, over which we have no control** (Paul’s example in 2 Corinthians 12:10).
- **Those material circumstances in which the Lord has put us, over which we may have (some) control** (John the Baptist’s teaching in Luke 3:14, Paul’s example in Philippians 4:11-12, and the command in Hebrews 13:5).