

## Contentment

“Contentment” is not that hard to define- it is “the quality or state of being contented.” But this just leads us back to the root word, “content,” which has two basic meanings. The first is “to appease the desires of” (Webster’s New Collegiate Dict.), that is, to get what you want. This isn’t biblical contentment, but it is, unfortunately, the practical application for most of us. We think we would be content if we could just have all (or most) of our desires fulfilled. However, even when such occurs, it usually doesn’t work that way.

The second definition of “content” is “to limit (oneself) in requirements, desires, or actions,” (*IBID*). Obviously, this is on the other end of the spectrum. Instead of getting everything you want, this is learning to be happy with what you have. Such is exactly the meaning of the Greek word, *autarkeia* (*autos*, self + *arkeo*, to be enough), which is translated as “contentment” in 1Timothy 6:6, “*But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment.*”

The pivot-point between these two opposing definitions is the difference between **wants** and **needs**. The first definition of “contentment” requires the fulfilling of our **desires** to be reached; while the second one is achieved when our basic **necessities** are met. Consider the next verses in 1Timothy 6:7-8, “*For we have brought nothing into this world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.*” I’m not sure how many of us would be content with just enough food to sustain us, and just enough clothing/shelter to protect us. I do know that whoever is able to be content with those bare necessities, would also be content with whatever luxuries God provided without becoming dependent upon them. Paul spoke of this in 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.*” Let’s take this basic understanding of “contentment” a bit further.

It occurs to me that the source of many of our spiritual problems is a lack of contentment with God’s provision. Think about it. What causes marital infidelity? Is it not a lack of contentment with the spouse God gave you, 1Corinthians 7:1-5? What causes greed? Is it not a lack of contentment with God’s provision of sustaining material things, Matthew 6:25-33? What causes most conflicts between us? Isn’t it that we are not content with what we are getting from the other person- whether it’s respect, tolerance, understanding, forgiveness, assistance, etc.? But if, in true contentment, we could obey Philippians 2:2-3, “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others,*” wouldn’t most of these conflicts disappear?

What about “contentment” in religion? If we would just content ourselves with doing what God said, how God said to do it, wouldn’t that simplify things dramatically? If we were content with Christ’s plan to save through believing (John 8:24), repenting (Luke 13:3), confessing (Matthew 10:32), being baptized for the remission of sins (1Peter 3:21), and living faithfully to the best of our abilities (John 14:15), then unity could result. If we were content with God’s instructions for simple New Testament worship, which included praying (1Timothy 2:8), singing (1Corinthians 14:15), partaking of the Lord’s Supper (1Corinthians 11:23-34), preaching/studying the word (Acts 2:42), and giving of our means (1Corinthians 16:1-2), then we could do away with robe-clad choirs, orchestras, dramatic performances, fund-raisers for every kind of activity and function, and all the “special” groups which divide us. Then, we could be together, and simply worship God “*in spirit and in truth.*” How great is the gain when godliness is accompanied by simple contentment with what God has said, cf. 1Timothy 6:6 and 1Peter 4:11!

It is a wonderful thing to content yourself: with God’s physical provision of life’s necessities; in your relationships with family, friends, and brethren; and with God’s plans of salvation and worship! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))