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Teaching Notes

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Christian Contentment BFL 2018: Week 9

Contentment in Marriage and Family Life

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. ¹² 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: The Evils and Excuses of a Murmuring Spirit

Today: we look at family life

Q: How is contentment essential to a healthy marriage?

Q: Why is it important for parents to model and teach Christian contentment to their children?

Q: What are some challenges to contentment that Christian families face in the 21st century that Christians in other centuries did not have to face?

I. Marriage is a Blessed Conduit of Earthly Delights... But It Needs Protection

A. A Picture of Christ and the Church

B. Song of Songs... Tremendous Delight in Marriage

Song of Solomon 8:10 I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment.

C. Like a Garden of Eden... But the Snake of Sin is Always Slithering

D. Too Many People Idolize Love and Marriage...

1. Christian contentment says, “Having Christ, I need nothing else.”
2. The world makes an idol of love and sexual fulfillment... as though that is the ultimate pleasure and meaning that there is in life
 - a. People speak of finding their “soul-mate” or “reason for existence”

1967 Temptations song: “You’re My Everything”

You surely must know magic, girl, 'cause you changed my life
 It was dull and ordinary
 But you made it sunny and bright
 I, I was blessed the day I found you, gonna build my whole world around you
 You're ev'rything good, girl and you're all that matters to me

- b. That is putting way too much on another person... it is the essence of an idol
3. When the love is lost (through death or the person leaving), the level of despair is unrivalled

1971 Harry Nilsson song: “Without You”

I can't live
 If living is without you
 I can't live
 I can't give anymore
 I can't live
 If living is without you

4. True Christian marriage is two people filled with the Holy Spirit seeking to give to the other... but not dependent on the other to fill a role that only Christ can fill
 5. Christian contentment is ultimately essential to this healthy perspective

E. Marriage a Workshop of Sanctification... and Contentment

1. A husband’s role is to help his wife get ready for her true husband, Christ, and her true home—heaven

Ephesians 5:25-28 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with

water through the word, ²⁷ *and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* ²⁸ *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.*

2. In doing so, he is helping himself get ready for the same things!
3. So also a godly wife should seek her husband's growth in all areas of godliness...
4. Learning the secret of Christian contentment together should be a focus of their marriage

F. The Need for Continual Humility Before God

Burroughs: "Many times in a family, when any affliction befalls them, Oh, what an amount of discontent is there between man and wife! If they are crossed in their possessions at land, or have bad news from across the seas, or if those whom they trusted are ruined and the like, or perhaps something in the family causes strife between man and wife, in reference to the children or servants, and there is nothing but quarrelling and discontent among them, now they are many times burdened with their own discontent; and perhaps will say one to another, It is very uncomfortable for us to live so discontented as we do. But have you ever tried this way, husband and wife? Have you ever got alone and said, 'Come, Oh let us go and humble our souls before God together, let us go into our chamber and humble our souls before God for our sin, by which we have abused those mercies that God has taken away from us, and we have provoked God against us. Oh let us charge ourselves with our sin, and be humbled before the Lord together.'? Have you tried such a way as this? Oh you would find that the cloud would be taken away, and the sun would shine in upon you, and you would have a great deal more contentment than ever you had."

II. Marriage Vows: A Mutual Promise to Seek Contentment

A. The Language of Vows is Similar to Paul's Assertion

1. Paul has learned the secret of being content "well fed or hungry, living in plenty or in want"
2. Marriage vows promise similar things

Most wedding vows speak language like this: "for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in health or sickness, forsaking all others, until death parts us."

Their promise to “**forsake all others**” is a commitment to kill roaming sexual discontentment. Their promise to love each other “**for richer or poorer**” is a commitment to grow in material contentment and kill covetousness and material discontent. Their promise to care for each other “**in sickness and in health**” is a promise that will challenge both of them especially at the end of one of their lives.

3. This is the language of striving after contentment “in any and every situation”

B. “Though the Fig Tree Does Not Blossom...”

1. John Piper had this passage read at his wedding

Habakkuk 3:17-19 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. ¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

C. A Lifetime Quest for Supernatural Contentment

The young man and woman who speak these vows to each other can scarcely imagine what it’s going to take to fulfill them in the decades that will follow. God will providentially stretch both of them seemingly to their breaking point, and will teach them what genuine godliness and supernatural unity is all about.

III. The Reality: Overwhelming Temptations Toward Discontentment

A. Martin Luther’s Evaluation

Good God, what a lot of trouble there is in marriage! Adam has made a mess of our nature. Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must have had in the course of their nine hundred years. Eve would say, “You ate the apple,” and Adam would retort, “You gave it to me.”

B. Paul on the Superiority of Singleness

I want you to be without concerns. An unmarried man is concerned about the things of the Lord-- how he may please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the things of the world—how he may please his wife—and he is divided. An unmarried woman or a virgin is concerned about the things of the Lord, so that

she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. Now I am saying this for your own benefit, not to put a restraint on you, but because of what is proper, and so that you may be devoted to the Lord without distraction. (1 Cor. 7:32-35)

C. Richard Baxter on the Difficulties of Marriage: *A Christian Directory*

- 1) Marriage ordinarily plunges men into an excess of worldly cares; it multiplies their business and usually their wants. There are many things to mind and do; there are many to provide for... you must look for many rubs and disappointments. Your natures are not so strong, content, and patient as to bear all these without frustration.
- 4) A married life contains far more temptations to worldliness or covetousness than a single life. For when you think you need more, you will desire more.... Birds and beasts that have young ones to provide for are most hungry and inordinately greedy.... And it is not only till death that you must now lay up; you must provide for children who survive you.
- 7) There is a meeting of faults and imperfections on both sides that makes it much harder to bear the infirmities of others aright. If one party only were [discontent] and impatient, the steadfastness of the other might make it more tolerable; but we are all sick of the same disease. When weakness meets with weakness, and pride meets with pride, and passion with passion, it exasperates the disease and doubles the suffering.
- 9) The business of a married state often devours almost all your time, so that little is left for holy contemplations or serious thoughts of the life to come. All God's service is contracted and thrust into a corner and done as it were on the by. The world will scarcely allow you time to meditate or pray or read the Scripture; you think yourselves like Martha, under a greater necessity of dispatching your business than of sitting at Christ's feet to hear his Word.
- 10) There is so great a diversity of temperaments and degrees of understanding that there are scarce any two persons in the world but there is some unsuitableness between them. Like stones that have some unevenness that makes them lie crooked in the building, there will be some crossness of opinion, disposition, interest, or will, by nature or by custom and education, which will stir up frequent discontents.

IV. The Deadly Danger of Sexual Discontentment

A. The Devastation of Sexual Infidelity

1. The Bible makes it plain that adultery is a devastating, life-altering event
2. David's life was never the same again after his adultery with Bathsheba; the effects of his sin on his family continued for the rest of his life
3. The Book of Proverbs says the adulterer can never find forgiveness from the man whose wife has sinned with

Proverbs 6:32-35 But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. ³³ Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away; ³⁴ for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. ³⁵ He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is.

4. Proverbs says this sin can end in public shame... it can even cost you your life:

Proverbs 5:11-14 At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. ¹² You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! ¹³ I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. ¹⁴ I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly."

Proverbs 7:22-23 All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose ²³ till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

5. The greatest concern of all... the judgment of God

Proverbs 5:20-23 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? ²¹ For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths. ²² The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. ²³ He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly.

6. Statistics show that 1/3rd of marriages in America end in a divorce in which adultery is cited as the primary cause (cited in a recent University of Chicago study on Infidelity)
7. Anecdotal evidence

Some time ago, I was reading on the internet a story of a non-Christian businessman in England who had a momentary "fling" with a co-worker at an

office Christmas party. The dominoes began falling hours after their “indiscretion” (sin). His wife found out, packed up the kids and left him. His boss found out, and he lost his job. Within months, he had lost his home and everything he valued in this world. The reporter who wrote the account had found him under a bridge in London, addicted to heroin. The whole slide had taken less than three years. I read this account in horror, and I never found it again. I searched for it online and could not locate it. It flitted away into the ether of the cyberworld. But its facts stuck with me.

B. The Root Cause: Discontentment in Marriage

James 1:13-15 *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

James 4:1-2 *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.*

C. The Evil Eye... Constantly Seeking “Something else”

Matthew 6:22-23 *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

2 Peter 2:14 *With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed-- an accursed brood!*

D. Clear Counsel from Proverbs 5

Proverbs 5:15-19 *Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. ¹⁶ Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? ¹⁷ Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. ¹⁸ May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.*

This is the language of contentment... of a sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit that freely submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal!!

E. Matthew Henry’s Incisive Comments

1. You should be satisfied with your choice and God's choice:

Let him that is married take delight in his wife, and let him be very fond of her, not only because she is the wife that he himself has chosen and he ought to be pleased with his own choice, but because she is the wife that God in his providence appointed for him and he ought much more to be pleased with the divine appointment, pleased with her because she is his own.

2. Enrich your marriage by loving you wife dearly and expressing that delight regularly:

Think thyself very happy in her, look upon her as a blessed wife, let her have thy blessing, pray daily for her, and then *rejoice with her*.

3. Let your wife be the rest you seek from your labors

Let him be fond of his wife and love her dearly (v. 19): *Let her be as the loving hind and the pleasant roe*. ... Desire no better diversion from severe study and business than the innocent and pleasant conversation of thy own wife; let her lie in thy bosom, as the poor man's ewe-lamb did in his (2 Sa. 12:3), and do thou repose thy head in hers, and let that *satisfy thee at all times*; and seek not for pleasure in any other.

4. Despise with all your heart the very thought of turning away from her to another woman:

Why wilt thou be so sottish (i.e. drunkenly stupid), such an enemy to thyself, as to prefer puddle-water, and that poisoned too and stolen, before pure living waters out of thy own well?

5. Let the men of the internet age cease from roaming in their hearts to build a cyber-harem by which they can wander any time they choose and lust after a limitless number of rivals to their wives. This sin has devastated many Christian marriages in the 21st century. Matthew Henry would say this:

Enjoy with satisfaction the comforts of lawful marriage, which was ordained for the prevention of uncleanness, and therefore ought to be made use of in time, lest it should not prove effectual for the cure of that which it might have prevented. Let none complain that God has dealt unkindly with them in forbidding them those pleasures which they have a natural desire of, for he has graciously provided for the regular gratification of them. "Thou mayest not indeed eat of every tree of the garden, but choose thee out one, which thou pleasest, and of

that thou mayest freely eat; nature will be content with that, but lust with nothing." God, in thus confining men to one, has been so far from putting any hardship upon them that he has really consulted their true interest

F. Wives Also Need to Be Content with their Husbands

1. It's easy to see the flaws... "Familiarity breeds contempt"
2. It's easy to take to mocking and disrespect

2 Samuel 6:20 When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

3. Guard your heart from roaming after dreams of romance (as seen in romantic movies, novels)

V. Independent Joy in Christ in the Context of Growing Unity in Marriage

A. The Essence of Contentment: Independence from all Created Things

1. Paul used the word "self-sufficiency" for contentment
2. He wanted the Philippians to know that he was indeed thankful for the money they sent, but that he didn't really need it... he wasn't dependent on it for the sustenance of his soul
3. YET he could enjoy it in a secondary way
4. So also ironically the healthiest husbands and wives have an independence from each other in terms of ultimate soul contentment

B. The Essence of Marriage: Supernatural Unity

1. BUT you will say, isn't the essence of marriage this: "The two shall become one?"
2. The goal of all Christian marriages IS unity in Christ
3. To harmonize that with Christian contentment is the two become one in realizing that Christ alone can satisfy the soul... but that there is a secondary pleasure in each other that brings genuine delight

4. God the Father NEEDS NOTHING from Creation... yet he DELIGHTS in his creation and deeply yearns for the creation to be with him

C. Put on Your Mask First!

1. Day to day, we live this out in this way

- a. Each of you should seek an independent contentment in Christ alone through your prayer and Bible study
- b. You can thus be at peace and filled with the Spirit NO MATTER WHAT is going on with your spouse
- c. If the spouse is miserable or angry or selfish, you don't have to join in that poor state
- d. Our sin is our own fault! If the spouse is murmuring, we don't have to join in!

Job 2:8-10 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. ⁹His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!" ¹⁰He replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

- e. Christ has set us free forever from sin

Romans 6:11-12 count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

No temptation toward discontentment can ever MAKE US sin... we can always refuse every temptation by the Spirit

2. Illustration: Air masks on a plane

Ever heard this before?

“In the unlikely event of a loss of cabin pressure, panels above your seat will open revealing oxygen masks. Reach up and pull a mask towards you. Place it over your nose and mouth, and secure with the elastic band that can be adjusted to ensure a snug fit. The plastic bag will not fully inflate, although oxygen is flowing. **Secure your own mask first before helping others.**”

You put your own mask on first because if you don't, you will be part of the problem rather than part of the solution!

So also with contentment... be sure your own mask is in place first... the air flowing through the Spirit. Then you will be peaceful, secure, able to assist your spouse return to contentment

VI. "If Mama Ain't Happy, Ain't Nobody Happy"

A. Well-Known Statement... the contentment of the Mom affects the entire family

B. The Quarrelsome Wife of Proverbs

Proverbs 21:9 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife.

Proverbs 21:19 Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife.

C. Fisherman and His Wife: Grimm's Fairy Tale

Once upon a time there were a fisherman and his wife who lived together in a filthy shack near the sea. Every day the fisherman went out fishing, and he fished, and he fished. Once he was sitting there fishing and looking into the clear water, and he sat, and he sat. Then his hook went to the bottom, deep down, and when he pulled it out, he had caught a large flounder.

Then the flounder said to him, "Listen, fisherman, I beg you to let me live. I am not an ordinary flounder, but an enchanted prince. How will it help you to kill me? I would not taste good to you. Put me back into the water, and let me swim."

"Well," said the man, "there's no need to say more. I can certainly let a fish swim away who knows how to talk."

With that he put it back into the clear water, and the flounder disappeared to the bottom, leaving a long trail of blood behind him.

Then the fisherman got up and went home to his wife in the filthy shack.

"Husband," said the woman, "didn't you catch anything today?"

"No," said the man. "I caught a flounder, but he told me that he was an enchanted prince, so I let him swim away."

"Didn't you ask for anything first?" said the woman.

"No," said the man. "What should I have asked for?"

"Oh," said the woman. "It is terrible living in this shack. It stinks and is filthy. You should have asked for a little cottage for us. Go back and call him. Tell him that we want to have a little cottage. He will surely give it to us."

"Oh," said the man. "Why should I go back there?"

"Look," said the woman, "you did catch him, and then you let him swim away. He will surely do this for us. Go right now."

The man did not want to go, but neither did he want to oppose his wife, so he went back to the sea.

When he arrived there it was no longer clear, but yellow and green. He stood there and said:

Mandje! Mandje! Timpe Te!
Flounder, flounder, in the sea!
My wife, my wife Ilsebill,
Wants not, wants not, what I will

The flounder swam up and said, "What does she want then?"

"Oh," said the man, "I did catch you, and now my wife says that I really should have asked for something. She doesn't want to live in a filthy shack any longer. She would like to have a cottage."

"Go home," said the flounder. "She already has it."

The man went home, and his wife was standing in the door of a cottage, and she said to him, "Come in. See, now isn't this much better?"

There was a little front yard, and a beautiful little parlor, and a bedroom where their bed was standing, and a kitchen, and a dining room. Everything was beautifully furnished and supplied with tin and brass utensils, just as it should be. And outside there was a little yard with chickens and ducks and a garden with vegetables and fruit.

"Look," said the woman. "Isn't this nice?"

"Yes," said the man. "This is quite enough. We can live here very well."

"We will think about that," said the woman.

Then they ate something and went to bed.

Everything went well for a week or two, and then the woman said, "Listen, husband. This cottage is too small. The yard and the garden are too little. The flounder could have given us a larger house. I would like to live in a large stone palace. Go back to the flounder and tell him to give us a palace."

The cottage became a stone palace:

Inside the palace there was a large front hallway with a marble floor. Numerous servants opened up the large doors for them. The walls were all white and covered with beautiful tapestry. In the rooms there were chairs and tables of pure gold. Crystal chandeliers hung from the ceilings. The rooms and chambers all had carpets. Food and the very best wine overloaded the tables until they almost collapsed. Outside the house there was a large courtyard with the very best carriages and stalls for horses and cows. Furthermore there was a magnificent garden with the most beautiful flowers and fine fruit trees and a pleasure forest a good half mile long, with elk and deer and hares and everything that anyone could possibly want.

"Now," said the woman, "isn't this nice?"

"Oh, yes" said the man. "This is quite enough. We can live in this beautiful palace and be satisfied."

"We'll think about it," said the woman. "Let's sleep on it." And with that they went to bed.

The next morning the woman woke up first. It was just daylight, and from her bed she could see the magnificent landscape before her. Her husband was just starting to stir when she poked him in the side with her elbow and said, "Husband, get up and look out the window. Look, couldn't we be king over all this land?"

.....

She is so discontent nothing will satisfy her!

King... then Emperor... then Pope... then (finally) she wanted to be God himself

They end up back in their original shack!

D. Root Cause There: Materialism... Grinding discontent with God's provision

E. Men Can Be Discontent Too... Like Nabal

1 Samuel 25:14-17 One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. ¹⁵ Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. ¹⁶ Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. ¹⁷ Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

F. We OWE IT to the Lord and to Each Other to Be Content in Christ!

1. Christ crucified and resurrected HAS DONE ENOUGH for you to be content
2. You OWE IT to him to be content
3. And you owe it to your family as well

VII. Modelling and Teaching Contentment to Your Children

A. Children come into the world discontent

“Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered: he wants what he wants... his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch, or whatever. Deny him these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is dirty; he has no morals, no knowledge, and no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, but all children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to their impulsive actions to satisfy every want, every child would grow up a criminal, a killer, a thief, and a rapist.” Police Study in San Francisco on Juvenile Delinquency

B. An extremely discontent age... smartphones and continual social media access make for a roaming discontent that needs to be put to death by the Spirit

C. Primary Call of Parents: Bring them up in the gospel

D. Christian Contentment a major theme of discipleship

E. How is your role modelling?

VIII. Sharing in Suffering

A. A Cord of Three Strands

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: ¹⁰ If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! ¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

B. Laboring Together in Contentment in Extreme Trials

C. The Devastating Statistics of the Effects of Major Trials on Marriages

D. Annie Garrett