



Biblical Foundations

Contentment

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 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 all this through him who gives me strength.

— **Philippians 4:10-13 (NIV)**

In the rural outskirts of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, sits the largest buffet restaurant in the United States—Shady Maple Smorgasbord. Its 200-foot buffet line offers scores of delicious Pennsylvania Dutch food items, much like Mom used to make when I was growing up.

Having spent most of my life in Lancaster County, my family and I would make regular visits to Shady Maple. Planning our dining experience was a challenge because we wanted to sample as many things as possible before having to call it quits and push back the plate. I cannot tell you how many times I walked away stuffed at the end of the meal, regretting those last two desserts and that generous portion of brown buttered noodles I polished off.

What is the attraction with the all-you-can-eat smorgasbord? Why do people spend significantly more money to feast at a buffet versus ordering off a menu? It is the abundance! The variety! The appeal of all that amazing, irresistible food! We want it all, even though we could not possibly eat it all.

Why would anyone want to spend that much money to eat at a buffet and stuff themselves to the point of discomfort? Why not simply dine at a restaurant where you can order off the menu, fill up on a delightful meal, and walk out with a doggie bag? (Even the buffet with its higher prices will not allow you to take home a doggie bag!) Is there really any value in all that abundance if it far surpasses your needs or even desires?

Now don't get me wrong. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a good buffet. I still love to visit good old Shady Maple when we visit friends and family in Lancaster County. My point is simply this. It's important to understand the difference between excess and "enough." Sir Thomas Malory, 15th century English writer, put it well when he stated, "Enough is as good as a feast."



Fallen human nature drives us to make more of the things around us than God intends. John calls it “the lust of the eyes” (I Jn 2:16). Paul calls it “the love of money” (I Tim 6:10). When we crave and gorge ourselves on abundance simply for the sake of abundance, discontentment comes as an unwelcome side.

But an abundance of things will not bring us contentment. In case you doubt, note the words of Solomon, one of the richest men who ever lived: “Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless” (Eccles. 5:10).

God promised to meet all our needs. And, as long as our needs are met, we can be content. Or, at least, we should be. Contentment is not found in the number of things we have. It is found in trusting God who always provides all we need (enough) to accomplish His purposes, wherever we are and whatever may come.

In Philippians, it seems Paul discovered contentment through reverent submission to and satisfaction in Christ alone (and not in any idol, including any felt need or desired circumstance). Having experienced both plenty and want, he realized that there was no real advantage to having an abundance of resources and material things. There may have, in fact, been numerous disadvantages. For Paul, having enough was, ... well, enough. Contentment is something he had to learn because it runs contrary to human nature. But receiving peace forever with God through Christ provided his contentment for each day. And it can lead us to peace, as well.

How do we learn contentment? How can we manage our overwhelming desire for abundance and our constant want of “more”? How do we find the peace that Paul found in our struggle with our material desires? We can do this through Him who gives us strength!

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NASB) that “God loves a cheerful giver.” That is because, when we give to God, we are demonstrating that which He has demonstrated to us in His giving. We are showing Him that we love Him.