

Christian Ethics, Pt. 2: The Principles of Contentment

Scripture: Hebrews 13:5–6

Code: 1640

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews resolves in chapter 13 with a series of practical exhortations following twelve chapters of doctrine. That arrangement illustrates an important principle of teaching: Before there can be effective exhortation on duty, there must be instruction in doctrine. The latter is the foundation on which duty is built. Obedience to a given standard is difficult to practice unless there's a reason for that standard. So doctrine should always precede duty. Knowing our position in Christ precedes the practice of our Christianity. No man will ever be able to follow Christian ethics unless he knows Jesus Christ. Only then does he gain the power to do so. The practical life is only possible when we have a knowledge of Jesus Christ and a foundation of sound doctrine. Romans 12:1 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice. . . ." Paul entreats us on the basis of the mercies of God, which are all the doctrines in the first eleven chapters. Because of what God has done for us, we are asked to live sacrificially for Him.

A. The Purpose of Christian Ethics

That principle is very important, because if we are going to proclaim our doctrine to the world, then we're going to have to match it with our life. For example, if I tell you about an outstanding automobile that is better than any other car, but it is in the shop getting fixed, you probably would be reluctant to believe that the automobile is as good as I made it sound. Similarly, if my life doesn't match what I say, then you really won't listen to me. You must have a sound doctrinal foundation that manifests itself in service before you can have a strong testimony that enables you to effectively pronounce doctrine to others.

God wants us to witness to the world. But in order to be able to communicate, we need to live the kind of life that backs up what we say. That is the essence of Hebrews 13. It discusses the life we have to live if we're going to stand in the face of the world and proclaim the cause of Jesus Christ. If we do not support Christianity by our lives, then the world sees God as a liar, Jesus Christ as a fraud, and Christianity as a joke. Practical holiness is strategic to our proclamation of doctrinal truth. The effectiveness of our witness to the world depends on how we live. If you cannot pattern your living to fit your speech, you might as well not speak.

B. The Product of Christian Ethics

When we govern our lives by Christian ethics, we experience personal joy. A Christian who does not live according to God's standards lives apart from joy. You can't sin by disobeying God's standards and still be a happy Christian. You will experience guilt, and that produces insecurity. My greatest joy is when I've been obedient to the standards of the Lord. If you think sin is fun, try holiness for a while!

1. Psalm 19:8--"The statutes of the +LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the +LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. " Obeying God's standards brings joy.
2. Psalm 64:10--"The righteous shall be glad in the +LORD. . . ." In other words, the man who lives a righteous life is a happy man.
3. Psalm 68:3--"But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God, yea, let them exceedingly

rejoice. " A by-product of righteousness is rejoicing. Do you want to be a happy person? Do what is right--obey God's standards.

4. Psalm 97:11--"Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. " Happy people are those who obey God.

5. Psalm 119:111--"Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. " The word "testimonies" is synonymous with the commandments, instructions, statutes, and law of God. Therefore, the psalmist says, "What makes me happiest is obeying God's standards. " Some people may think that sinning is fun--but every sin eventually has negative consequences.

6. Ecclesiastes 2:26--"For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy. . . . " Do you want joy? Then be good in God's sight--not in the sight of the world. You can be good from the world's perspective and be deceived into thinking that your carnal goodness is pleasing to God.

7. Jeremiah 15:16--"Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart. . . . " Jeremiah said, "I took Your law and made it mine, and I was happy. " It's a shame that there are so many miserable Christians. They haven't learned to obey the principles of God. If you have a lack of joy, recognize the response that is the key to a productive and joyous Christian life: obedience.

We should obey the principles of God so we can have a clear testimony to the world and personal joy. Those two are inseparable, for when you are a joyous Christian, people will recognize that there's something different about you. When that happens, evangelism is merely a result of overflowing joy. People have a hard time ignoring somebody who is happy. When you communicate your faith to somebody else, that also is a cause for joy. In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20, Paul identified what gave him great joy: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy. " Paul suffered while laboring so that others could experience faith in Christ, but he still received joy: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all" (Phil. 2:17). In other words, "Whatever it takes to bring you to salvation--death or persecution--I will gladly accept. " He also addressed the Philippians as "my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown. . . " (4:1). The joy of Paul was the salvation of others. That came about in part because Paul's life matched his words.

Joy and witnessing are inseparable--you can pursue them in either order: Seek to have a clear witness that will bring people to Christ, and you will have joy. Or, seek to have joy, and you will have a witness people won't be able to resist.

REVIEW

The author of the book of Hebrews lays down principles of conduct in his thirteenth chapter. They bring about the salvation of others and joy to ourselves. The three sections that we will be examining are the ethics, the example, and the energy. If we're going to live the kind of life we ought to live, then we need to know what ethics to follow. Second, we need an example to follow. And third, we need to have the energy to follow that example.

I. THE ETHICS (vv. 1-19)

A. In Relation to Others (vv. 1-3)

1. Sustained Love (vv. 1-2)

a. For Brothers (v. 1) Since love precludes the need for other rules, Christian conduct can be reduced to the simple, common denominator of loving people. Love is not an emotion; it's a principle of self-sacrifice. Regardless of how you feel toward a person emotionally, you can still love him by meeting his needs, bearing his burdens, and praying for him. Christians immediately receive love

when they are saved, for "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. . . " (Rom. 5:5). Our responsibility is to express the love that God has already given to us. One of the most wonderful chapters in the Bible is John 13. Verse 1 says, "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end. " Jesus' love never changed at all--and it never will--because it is not an emotion; it is an expression of self-sacrifice. Paul said, "For the love of Christ constraineth us. . . " (2 Cor. 5:14). Christ's love is a controlling factor in our attitudes and actions. Since we have Christ's unchanging love, we must make sure that we continue to share it with others. b. For Strangers (v. 2) God will sometimes bring people into your path that you need to show love to. They may have a tremendous need, and an act of love from you may turn their life around.

2. Sympathy (v. 3)

a. The Exhortation b. The Example c. The Expression Sympathy is another dimension of love. It can be shown in at least three ways: 1) By Personal Presence Second Timothy 1:16-18 says, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain, but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day; and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well. " Being present with somebody in need is one way of expressing sympathy. 2) By Deeds of Love Paul received some needed sympathy when he was in jail. Philippians 4:14-18 says, "Notwithstanding, ye have well done, that ye did share with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound. I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God. " In other words, "No one gave me any money to carry on my ministry, but I'm glad you gave. Not only did your gift help me, but you will be blessed as well. 3) By Prayer Paul closed Colossians with these words: "Remember my bonds" (4:18). In other words, "Don't forget that I'm in jail; pray for me. "Our basic obligation to other people is to love them. That is the only rule that you need because if you love people, you're not going to break any other laws. Romans 13:8-10 says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to its neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. " For that reason, Hebrews 13 doesn't list a large number of commands. All it says is, "Love. "The Old Testament era had a disadvantage: There wasn't the love of Christ in people to enable them to love without rules. But the New Testament presents Christ's love, and all we need to do is sustain it. Loving others becomes the focal point rather than keeping a list of rules. Someone expressed that thought by saying, "Love God and everybody else, and then do what you want. " If a man loves others, then he won't break the moral laws of God: He won't kill or hate people, because love will make a friend out of an enemy. If he loves, he'll never steal, for love doesn't take--it gives. A man who loves will never covet, for an uncontrolled desire for self-satisfaction is not characteristic of selfless love. Paul said that love is "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14)--it ties everything together.

B. In Relation to Ourselves (vv. 4-7)

1. Sexual Purity (v. 4)

a. The Perspectives of Scripture b. The Punishment of Sin c. The Preoccupation of Society The topic of sex was a taboo many years ago--one didn't openly use that word. But now sex is readily accepted and another taboo has replaced it: death. If you want to quickly put a stop to a

conversation, just interject that topic. In a hedonistic society where the moment is everything, sex has become a way of life, and death is the thing that nobody wants to face. We live in a world that has exalted the sexual experience. That is not because people's desires are any different; it's just that society will let them push the limits to an extreme.

The Measure of True Love

When two people allow their passions to run away with them, and find themselves in a sexually compromising situation, that's not because they love each other too much; they don't love each other enough. Their love is not deep enough to respect each other's purity before God. If a guy says to his girlfriend, "I love you very much. Give me what I want," he doesn't love her as much as he thinks. His love hasn't developed to the point where the most important thing in his life is his girlfriend's purity. Respecting one's purity before God is the measure of true love. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 Paul said, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is outside the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." The Bible says that a sexual relationship outside of marriage defiles the purity of one's own body.

I'll never forget a college girl coming to me, who was emotionally shattered. She said, "I had only been a Christian a little time when I got involved in a youth group. The group's president was the first Christian I really got to know. One night he asked me out on a date. I thought, 'How wonderful to go out with a Christian! How different it'll be from what I'm used to.'" She went out with him and before the night was over, he had destroyed her purity, her confidence in Christianity, and her trust in others. That scenario has happened many other times as well.

d. The Pursuit of Sexual Purity Purity in the sexual area is very important. God is certainly not against sex, for He invented it. He created it as a beautiful and fulfilling relationship within the bounds of marriage. Don't let the possibility that Christ may return before you get married lead you into a sexual relationship. Noted Christian conference speaker Ken Poure has said, "If God invented sex for down here, whatever's going on in heaven will be a lot better!" So, don't worry about it. The point is, God desires purity. There is a simple phrase worth remembering in. . . 1) 1 Timothy 5:22--". . . keep thyself pure." Avoid that which would mar your purity. 2) Genesis 39:7-23--Joseph knew what to do when faced with sexual temptation. Potiphar's wife thought Joseph was a good catch, so she repeatedly tried to seduce him. When she caught hold of him while he was working in the house one day, he did the only smart thing--he ran. He didn't say, "I'd like to tell you where I stand on this." He fled from the danger of temptation. And although he was falsely accused, God eventually exalted him. If you find yourself in a compromising situation, don't try to reason with temptation--just get out of the situation. Consider what God thinks about sexual immorality, like Joseph did: ". . . How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (v. 9). I've heard Christians say that they didn't think sex outside of marriage was wrong, but that verse clearly indicates that it is. David knew that too, even though he lusted after Bathsheba, committed adultery with her, and killed her husband in an effort to cover up his tracks. When it was all over, he confessed to God by saying, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight. . . ." (Ps. 51:4). He knew that what he did was wrong. 3) 1 Corinthians 9:27--Personal purity is a battle for everybody. Keeping your sinful physical desires in line with God's will requires determination. The Apostle Paul said, "I keep under [discipline] my body, and bring it into subjection. . . ." When Satan tempts people today with all the pressure of the media, you can have a hard time avoiding sexual sin. There comes a time when you need to run. Christians who failed to do so have had their testimonies destroyed and have forfeited their personal joy.

2. Satisfaction (vv. 5-6)

This follows very closely after the idea of sexual purity, because it too involves lusting after something that is forbidden. a. The Requirement (v. 5a)"Let your manner of life be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have. . . ."1) The Condemnation of

CovetousnessCovetousness is a terrible evil whether you're coveting a neighbor's wife, money, or other material things. It was one of the vices that was never to characterize a leader in the early church. Paul instructed that elders were not to be "given to wine, not violent, not greedy of filthy lucre. . . not covetous" (1 Tim. 3:3). The spiritually-mature Christian understands that "godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). If you want to be truly rich--be happy with what you have.

The One Sin That No One Admits

Spurgeon, the nineteenth century English preacher, admitted that in all his years of hearing people confess their sins, he never once heard anyone confess the sin of covetousness. There are many sins that people confess, but I have never heard covetousness confessed either. Yet, it is a sin that everyone of us fights. At one point or another, most of us are tempted by bigger and better things like promotions, houses, cars, or clothes.

2) The Contrast to Covetousness) ExpressedSince covetousness is a serious sin, God desires that we learn how to experience godliness with contentment. The truly rich man is the one who knows that God will provide all that he needs. That is what Hebrews 13:5-6 means when it says, ". . . be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. "b) ExemplifiedThe people that the author of Hebrews was writing to had lost many of their possessions, according to Hebrews 10:34. There might have been some of them who said, "We have to recover what was taken from us. " But the writer exhorted them to be satisfied, and not to worry if somebody took everything they had. If you have the Lord, you have all that is important. Conversely, if a man has everything, but doesn't have Christ, he has nothing. We will have to leave behind what we possess when we die or when Jesus comes; therefore we shouldn't be afraid to lose things. I've often wondered how people could amass fortunes in this temporal world. They could have invested in God's work and produced eternal dividends. 3) The Characters of CovetousnessCovetousness had disastrous results for those who failed to master it:a) Adam (cf. Gen. 3:6, 17-19; Rom. 5:14, 18-19)b) Balaam, "who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15; Josh. 13:22). c) Achan (Josh. 7:21-25). God instructed the Israelites not to take for themselves any of the spoils of the city they had destroyed. But Achan took that which was forbidden and buried it in a hole under his tent, thinking that no one would ever find out. d) Gehazi (2 Kgs. 5:15-27). Naaman, an officer in the Syrian army, contracted leprosy. He was instructed by Elisha, the prophet, to wash in the Jordan seven times. In humiliation, he did as he was instructed, and was miraculously healed. Then in gratitude, he offered to pay the prophet for his healing, but Elisha accepted nothing. So Elisha's servant, Gehazi, took off after Naaman to acquire some of the things that Elisha had refused. He lied to Naaman, saying that Elisha had changed his mind and decided he could use some of the silver and clothes that had been offered to him. Naaman gladly gave more than Gehazi deceptively requested. When he returned to Elisha, he was confronted by the prophet and cursed with leprosy for his covetousness. e) Judas (Mt. 26:14-16; 27:3-10). f) Ananias and Sapphira (Ac. 5:1-11). They lied to the Holy Spirit and dropped dead. Covetousness is a very serious sin. God deals with it very seriously. 4) The Cautions Against CovetousnessThe most common form of covetousness is the love of money--lusting after material riches. Verse 5 says, "Let your manner of life be without covetousness [aphilarguros = lit. 'without liking silver']. . . ." Therefore, living without covetousness literally means to be without the love of money. If you begin to love money, you are sinning against God. Covetousness will result in an ineffective testimony and a lack of joy in your life. a) Luke 12:15--"And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth. " Lusting after material riches is sin. I'm not saying that it's wrong to have money; it's wrong to lust after it. Take note that the Bible doesn't say money is the root of all evil, but that "the **love** of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). b) Deuteronomy

8:18--"But thou shalt remember the +LORD thy God; for it is He who giveth thee power to get wealth. . . . " Some of the wealthiest men in the world were godly men, like Job and Abraham. c) Psalm 62:10--". . . if riches increase, set not your heart upon them. " That's a key to contentment. d) Job 31:24-28--"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, this also was an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I should have denied the God who is above. " For a man to love money or anything else is to, in effect, deny God. There's no place for covetousness in the life of a Christian. e) 1 Timothy 6:6-11--"But godliness with contentment is great gain; for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" (vv. 6-9). It doesn't say that the rich fall into temptation, but that those who desire to be rich will fall. When John D. Rockefeller was asked how much money he wanted, he said a million dollars. After he had made a million, the same man asked him that question again, and Rockefeller said he wanted another million. Associated with accumulating wealth is the law of decreasing satisfaction. Verses 10-11 go on to say, For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things. . . . "f) Ecclesiastes 5:10--"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance, with increase. . . . " Again we see the law of diminishing returns applied to coveting wealth: The more you have, the more you want. In fact, people are kept from salvation by the love of money, and Christians are robbed of joy by seeking that which cannot ultimately satisfy. Satisfaction is an important standard for a believer's life. When covetousness tempts you, run from it. Don't ever get into the position where you are more concerned about your bank balance than your spiritual life. b. The Resources (vv. 5b-6)". . . for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. "1) The Promise for ContentmentWe must learn to be content with whatever we have, resting in the promise that God will provide for us and protect us. The psalmist said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor His seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). The writer of Hebrews quotes Psalm 118:6 in verse 6, reminding his readers that the Lord is their helper. Thereake care of you. 2) God's OmniscienceSecond, realize that God is omniscient. That means that He knows what you need before you even ask. The psalmist states that he had never seen "the righteous forsaken, nor His seed begging bread" (Ps. 37:25; cf. 18-19; Lk. 12:30). 3) God's GraciousnessRealize what you deserve. Genesis 32:10 records the humility of Jacob, when he said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies. . . . " His perspective was correct. Everything I have I don't deserve, yet I am spiritually rich through God's grace. 4) God's SupremacyRealize that God will give you what He knows you need. Know however, that He desires some people to have less than others. First Samuel 2:7-8 says, "The +LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich; He bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the refuse, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory. . . . " In other words, if a man rises from the bottom to the top, financially speaking, it was God who brought him up. 5) God's RichesRealize what true riches really are. It is the people of the unbelieving world who are really poor. Colossians 3:2 says, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. " God has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Contentment comes from realizing those five elements, as well as by practicing. . . c. The Right PriorityCommunion with God is essential for contentment. Do you spend time with God? The longer you concentrate on His glory, the less you will care about acquiring more possessions. When you are fully committed to Jesus Christ, you will be so overwhelmed with how rich you are that you couldn't care less about anything else. The world

is going to pass away and everything in it (1 Jn. 2:17). Therefore, don't lay up treasure on earth; lay it up in heaven (Mt. 6:19-20).

Focusing on the Facts

1. Explain the important principle of teaching with regard to doctrine and duty.
2. What must you have before you can have a strong testimony that enables you to effectively pronounce the gospel to others?
3. What do we experience when we govern our lives by the standards of Christian ethics? Explain.
4. What gave Paul joy?
5. Explain how joy can result from witnessing, and vice versa.
6. What is love? How can you love a person that you are not emotionally attracted to?
7. What are three ways that sympathy can be shown to others?
8. What should be our only debt, according to Romans 13:8-10?
9. Explain how the moral law is kept by loving others.
10. What topic today is taboo? Why? What has happened to the former taboo?
11. In a romantic relationship, what is the measure of true love?
12. Explain how Joseph responded to the danger of sexual temptation.
13. According to Genesis 39:9 and Psalm 51:4, against whom is sexual immorality a sin?
14. What is it that a spiritually mature man knows that allows him to be content?
15. Why shouldn't we be afraid to lose material possessions?
16. Using the verses references provided on page xx, explain the consequences of the covetousness of Balaam, and Achan.
17. What is the most common form of covetousness?
18. From a divine perspective, what is an invalid measure of a man's life, according to Luke 12:15?
19. What precisely is "the root of all evil," according to 1 Timothy 6:10?
20. From the verses listed on pages xx-xx, summarize some of the dangers of coveting riches.
21. What conclusion did the psalmist make in Psalm 37:25 about God's provision for His children?

Pondering the Principles

1. Are you presently lacking joy in your life? It is a valuable commodity that seems to easily escape us. Here are some questions you should ask yourself:
 - a. Are you obeying God's clearly revealed will recorded in the Bible (Ps. 119:111)?
 - b. Are you aware of any unconfessed sin in your life (Ps. 51:9, 12)?
 - c. Are you sharing your faith with others and helping them to grow spiritually (Phil. 2:17)?
 - d. Are you filled with the Spirit as a result of consciously yielding yourself to His control (Gal. 5:22)?
 - e. Are you communing with Christ through prayer and communion, awaiting His return (1 Cor. 11:24-26; 1 Pet. 1:8)?
2. Realizing that sexual purity is so important to God, what steps do you need to take to have victory in that area when temptation strikes? If you are dating someone, and this is a problem for you, maybe you need to agree upon biblical guidelines and set some precautionary measures with your him or her. If you have contemplated toying with some type of sexual immorality, rehearse in your mind what you need to do when a tempting situation arises.
3. Why do you think covetousness is a sin that no one seems to confess? How is coveting different from most of the other sins identified in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:2-17)? Meditate on 1 Timothy 6:6-11. In light of those authoritative words, how would you evaluate your own financial goals? Make sure that you don't overreact and ignore your material needs. Are you being a good steward with what God has given you? Are you providing for your family faithfully in order to meet their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention (1 Tim. 5:8)? If God blessed you with additional income (which doesn't necessarily mean that it comes apart from your own effort) do

you have a plan for wisely investing that money for the furtherance of God's Kingdom and your family's future? Finally, remember that "if riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Ps. 62:10). Commune with God and acknowledge dependence upon Him as the priority of your life. Then, regardless of what happens to you financially, you will be able to keep the proper perspective.

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