

## Calendar

Group 8 Meeting — Sunday, 10/4, after AM service at the Bridge's home.

Group 4 Meeting — Sunday, 9/27 after AM service.

## Contentment

In 4:4-6, the writer of Ecclesiastes, who identifies himself as Qoheleth, draws a conclusion from an observation. That's the mark of a wise man and one way of looking at the quality of wisdom. It is the ability to see twice: once, when you see what you see and again when you "see" the results of the action you saw.

Qoheleth observed many people who are seeking wealth for the worst possible reason: out of envy and covetousness. Whether one will ever be satisfied with money is doubtful (5:10), but clearly the man who seeks it only to one-up his neighbor is doomed to discontentment and will never be satisfied. It is chasing after wind.

But the answer is not to become lazy and non-productive; there must be balance in one's life. A lazy person is a fool whose lack of a proper work ethic will lead him to ruin. God blesses ambition when the ambition is the product of a pure heart. Someone said that ambition is the grease in the gears of life. There is nothing sacred or sweet about the lazy man (see Pr. 6-9; 13:4; 19:24; 20:4; 22:13, etc.).

The rule of a balanced life is stated in v. 6: "Better is a handful with quietness than two hands full of toil and striving after wind" (ESV). He doesn't say it's better to be empty-handed; in other words, it's not better to be poor. In fact, Qoheleth never glorifies poverty and is even critical of it at times, saying it can be the product of idleness and laziness. But one "handful" of the right stuff is sufficient to produce contentment in our lives. And, in fact, if both hands are on the plow, with the aim of getting rich or getting famous, you'd have to drop the handful of the good things that would otherwise bring you contentment.

Though he doesn't use the word here, Qoheleth puts a premium on contentment. I think that's the essence of the word he uses here, "quietness" ("tranquility" in the NIV). One handful of the things that are necessary for life will allow us to use the other hand to serve others. I'm not sure the writer had that particular picture in mind, but it fits when we consider our purpose here, in light of the teachings of Jesus. Jesus said He did not come to be served, but to serve (Mt. 20:28). If that is true of Him, it follows that His disciples would

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#### Service Times

Sunday Morning Assembly  
9:30 AM

Sunday Evening: 5:00 PM  
Wednesday Bible Study  
7:30 PM

Classes for all ages.

Private classes arranged at your convenience.

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have the same purpose in life. To serve others requires that we devote time to the enterprise. We can only devote what we have; if virtually all of our time is spent in "toiling" then we'll have no time to devote to service. Those who are content with what they have are going find more time to serve God and others.

Some argue, however, that they are only working so hard so that "someday" they will be in a position to have more time to do the Lord's work and serve others. It's the notion that once you get "all set" financially, then you can devote your time to noble causes. But that hardly ever works in the real world. It is so easy to get into a rut, and we know that a rut is just "a grave with the ends kicked out." Once you're in there, it's very difficult to extricate yourself. Not only that, the earning of wealth can become intoxicating, which is even more dangerous.

Qoheleth says that there is one thing for sure (and he should know): the path to contentment is not through the acquisition of wealth. Qoheleth warns repeatedly that contentment is not a by-product of the accumulation of wealth. Contentment is a product of being satisfied with a few things instead of spending one's life trying to "keep up with the Jones'."

Most of us know this. We know that even if we could achieve the level of success we

think we want, we wouldn't be happy. Yet we ignore what we know and we spend our days seeking financial utopia, know-

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ing that it is vain toil, a striving after wind.

Paul said, "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment" (I Tim. 6:6). There is great gain in being satisfied with food and clothing and modest living. We all know this. Yet, many allow their lives to become consumed with their work and the anxiety that inevitably becomes partner with it. They believe that a larger house in a prestigious neighborhood or an automobile with a luxury nameplate will make them happier. But when they look at their lives, they see two hands full of toil and they know that they are chasing after wind. And they are miserable inside.

For the Christian, the search for utopia creates guilt that can be hard to handle. There's an obvious rule of life that we sometimes forget. It's the rule of sacrificed alternatives. The rule is simple enough to state: if I spend x number of hours doing *this*, I have that many less hours to do *that*. That may not trouble a man who has less regard for his family than

he does for his ego. And it may not bother the man who has no regard for Christ and the demands of discipleship. But it can't sit well with the Christian who, because of his commitment to Christ, is vitally concerned with both.

The more I work at trying to gain earthly goods the less time I have for the truly important things in life — my family, my spiritual development and service to my neighbor. One of the Proverbs puts it this way: "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it" (15:17). Taken with Eccl. 6:6, we can conclude that the seeking after treasure makes it more difficult to seek after the things of God and therefore the fear of the Lord becomes an occasion for guilt, instead of motivation for good.

Therefore, it is "better" to be satisfied with the "handful." Contentment is valuable because it allows us to pursue the things of the Lord, instead of the things that make us look better or the things that we think will make us "happy." That, in turn, leads to even more contentment — though not satisfaction; we always strive to do better — content that we are giving the Lord our attention and time, instead of spending it all on ourselves.

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