



## Respectable Sins: Discontentment

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Tonight I want to begin by reading what I think is probably a pretty familiar story to most of you:

There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. He possessed 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, and 500 female donkeys, and very many servants, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. His sons used to go and hold a feast in the house of each one on his day, and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And when the days of the feast had run their course, Job would send and consecrate them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. The LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch

out your hand." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you." (Job 1:1-19)

Job not only had his servants and livestock – his livelihood – taken away from him, but even his sons and daughters. But that wasn't enough. The story goes on:

Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. And the LORD said to Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face." And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. (Job 2:1-7)

Last week I talked about how we respond to life's difficulties – how we become anxious or worried about the troubles that come our way, and even how we get angry and frustrated with them. And last week I explained how when we respond to life with anxiety we're being ungodly – we're living our lives and responding to life's circumstances as if God isn't involved. But there's another sin that can very easily creep into our lives that has ungodliness as its root too. It's another way that we often respond to life. It's discontentment.

Look at Job. Here's a guy who has it all. He's rich. He has a big family. God has blessed him abundantly and he knows it – and so he lives for God. And then one day Satan comes along and says to God, "Job only serves you because of the good life you've given him. If you let me take all that away, Job will drop you like a hot potato!" And to prove a point God gives Satan free reign over Job. And now Job's got nothing. In fact, we're left with this absolutely pathetic picture of Job in mourning. He tears his clothes and shaves his head, which was the thing to do in his culture to show mourning for his children. And he sits down on an ash heap – maybe the remains of his house – and picks up a broken piece of pottery to scratch and scrape at the open and leprous sores that cover his body.

Job knew that God was sovereign – that he was in control of all things. Even his wife knew. She saw him sitting there covered in filth and disease and said to him, "How can you still be faithful to God?!? Be done with it! Curse God and die!"

I think Job's a good example, because life just can't get much worse than what we've just read. We all have problems. I don't think most of us have ever had problems as extreme as Job's, but we've seen our children die. We've had the good things in life taken away. We've dealt with sickness and disease. There are all sorts of things in life that make us discontent with our situation: being stuck in a low-paying or unfulfilling job; being single into mid-life or beyond; not being able to have the kids we'd like; having an

unhappy marriage or being married to an unbelieving spouse; being plagued with continual health problems; or being stuck with physical disabilities or handicaps. My list isn't all-inclusive. I'd be willing to bet that everyone here can probably add something different to the list.

I think the most discontent I've ever felt was in my teenage years – the typical teenage angst that comes from not being happy with who you. God gave me terrible depth perception, so I was no good at sports that involved fast moving and flying balls – which ruled out just about everything other than track and swimming. God gave me a love of reading and study, and if you've always got your nose in a book you're labeled a nerd. But in hindsight I know that God gave me those things not as a teenage curse, but to prepare me for his service. We can choose to be discontent because from our limited perspective we see situations in life as a curse, or we can remember that our view is limited – we can't see the big picture, but that God can – and we can accept that he knows what's best in the long run.

Now there *are* some situations in which we should be discontent. Not all discontent is sinful. We should be discontent with our spiritual state. We should be discontent about sin in our lives. We should be discontent with evil and injustice in the world around us. It's discontentment with these things that drives us to grow and mature as Christians and that drives us to take action and do good in the world. But being discontent with the circumstances of life that God had given us is a sin. And that might come as a surprising statement. The problem is that we're too used to responding to difficult situations with anxiety, frustration, or discontentment that we've reached a point where we consider them normal reactions to life. And so if we do find ourselves thinking this way, it just underscores the subtleness of these sins and the fact that they've become "acceptable." When we fail to recognize these responses to our circumstances as sin, we're responding no differently from unbelievers who never factor God into their situations. We're back to ungodliness as the root cause of our sins.

Job new better. His wife may have told him to curse God and die, but look at

Job's response to what might be the worst situation any man could ever be in:

**And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21)**

Job's attitude was one of trust in God – just like we talked about last week. I can't think of a better Scripture to have stored away in your heart and mind that will help you to deal with difficulties in life – and because of this verse's place in popular culture, chances are you already know it. "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." This was the verse that was running through my mind over and over last December as the doctor held the ultrasound wand and told us that our baby had died. It was the verse going over and over through my head as the baby was delivered and as I held her tiny body in my hands. "The Lord gave. The Lord chose to take away. I choose to trust in him whom I know is the perfect embodiment of goodness. Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

The psalms weren't written yet, but Job understood the same principle that we saw last week in Psalm 136:16: "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

The truth that God has ordained all our days – and each and every hour, minute, and second – gave Job comfort and should give us comfort too. The world isn't out of control. Our lives aren't out of control. They may be out of *our* control. But they're always under *God's* divine control. He does nothing and he allows nothing without a purpose. And however mysterious or inscrutable his purposes may be to us, they are always for his glory and our good. St. Paul reminds us, "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.... If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:28, 31). David even says in that same psalm, "You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb." Even on the genetic level, God is at work in our lives. Its easy to give God thanks the physical abilities

he gives that seem like pluses to us, but how often do we thank him for what look to us to be minuses? I never thought to give thanks to God for poor depth perception, but the fact is that it was as much a gift as anything else he gave me – I just had to have the right perspective to understand that. And bad depth perception. Big deal. There's a multitude of people out there with serious disabilities and handicaps that they've learned to give thanks for and that have given them ability and reason for ministry. Whether we see something as a plus or minus really depends on whether or not we see God taking care of us as he promised, whether we trust him to work for our good or not.

I think it needs to be pointed out that there's a difference between accepting what God has given and resigning ourselves to it. How often have you simply thrown up your hands – given up and resigned yourself to forever having to deal with the things that make you discontent. This is often what we grudgingly do when we've realised that we have no choice and that the circumstance we're dealing with isn't likely to ever change. But when we simply resign ourselves to something, we end up harbouring a smouldering discontentment deep down in our hearts. If we resign ourselves to our problems, the usual result is bitterness and resentment – two more sinful thought patterns that poison our spirits.

Has anyone here ever been to a Family Life marriage conference? If you haven't been, you really should go – you'll come away greatly blessed and inspired. We've been to couple of these conferences and I they do a good job of setting your perspective straight. All sorts of couples go to these conferences – there're always even a few couples on their honeymoon. You can tell the latter because they're practically sitting in each other's lap. But there are also couples who have been married for years are at the end up their rope with problems – who are barely able to even talk civilly to each other. And the first night the conference leaders ask everyone to turn to their husband or wife and say the simple words, "You are not my enemy. I *receive* you as a gift from God." And God doesn't give bad gifts.

The key is what we see in Job: receiving life's circumstances as God's gift. Are we going to reject what God gives, or are we going to accept it as something good, even when it doesn't look good to us? It's only in *accepting* our circumstances – even giving thanks for them (which may take time) – that we find peace. Acceptance means that you accept your circumstances as being part of God's plan, that you put your trust in him, knowing that he unerringly knows what's best for you and that in his love, he purposes only that which is best. If you can get to that point – and I think we can only get there by God's grace and with the Spirit's help – then we're ready to use our difficult circumstances to glorify him. If all you do is *resign* yourself to your circumstance, you make yourself a victim, but when you accept it as a gift from God, you set yourself up to be a steward of that gift. You begin to ask, "God, how can I use what the world sees as a problem to serve you and to glorify you?"

An anonymous poem says:

Lord, I am willing to –  
Receive what you give,  
Lack what you withhold,  
Relinquish what you take.

That really sums it up. Are we willing to accept the hard things God puts in our lives? Are we willing to live without the things we want, but that God chooses not to give us? Are we willing to let go of the things he takes away?

As I emphasised last week: We'll always be fighting our circumstances and dealing with them sinfully until we understand the importance of a firm belief in the sovereignty, wisdom, and goodness of God in all the circumstances of our lives. Whether our circumstances are short-term or long-term, our ability to respond to them in a God-honouring and God-pleasing manner depends on our ability and willingness to bring these truths to bear on them. It's not easy, because these truths are contrary to the way the world sees things, but we can do it by faith. If you once had the faith to put your trust in God for the eternal destination of our soul, have faith now to put your trust in God for the things of this life and receive them all as good gifts from him – and give him thanks.

Please pray with me: Our Father, you remind us in Holy Scripture that even an evil parent gives his child bread when he ask for it, not a stone. If we as sinful parents know how to give good things to our children, how much more do you, our holy, just, and righteous Creator know how to give good gifts to your children. Give us the grace, Father, to receive every circumstance as a gift from you, that we may set aside bitterness and resentment and put your gifts to use for your glory. We ask this through the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

*(This series of sermons is adapted from Jerry Bridges book, "Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate", NavPress, 2007.)*