

A Call to Contentment in 2023

using

Thomas Watson's *The Art of Divine Contentment*

Contentment is “that sweet temper of spirit whereby a Christian carries himself in an equal poise in every condition,” seen in the following three aphorisms:

I. Contentment is a divine thing.

- A. It *becomes ours*, not by acquisition, but *by infusion*. It is a branch taken from the tree of life and implanted by the Spirit of God into the soul.
- B. It is a *fruit of heavenly birth*. Therefore, it is to be expected that it is joined with godliness. (1 Ti. 6:6)
 - 1. Being then a fruit of godliness, *true contentment is divine* and distinguished from a natural moral contentment.
 - a) A natural contentment is *civil*, but this is *sacred*.
 - b) A natural contentment is *grounded upon principles of reason*, but this upon principles of *faith*.
 - c) A natural contentment is *lit at nature's torch*, but this at the lamp of *Scripture*. To live securely and cheerfully upon God in the withering away of earthly comforts is a divine blessing put into the soul by God.

II. Contentment is an intrinsic thing.

- A. It lies not within the bark, but *in the root of the man*. Contentment has both its fountain and stream not in a man's outward condition but in his soul.
- B. Thus, the *comfort* of a contented man arises, not from his outward condition, but *from his soul*. For contentment does not depend upon externals. Therefore, our troubles cannot hinder our contentment.
- C. It is a *spiritual thing and arises from spiritual grounds*, namely, the apprehension of God's love.
- D. When there is *a tempest without*, there may be *music within*. Outward afflictions can't sting to the heart of a Christian's contentment. The soul possessed of contentment's treasure is like Noah in the ark—saved by waters that pour down wrath and preserved to sing in amidst the cataclysm.

III. Contentment is a habitual thing.

- A. Contentment is *a settled temper of the heart* and is constant in its flow, not casual. It does not appear only now and then, as some stars which are seldom seen. It shines with a fixed light in the firmament of the soul.
- B. Contentment is *the habit and complexion of his soul*. No one is truly content who is so only occasionally or when it's easy or pleasant to behave contentedly, but true contentment comes to him who is so constantly.

Scripture calls us to contentment and gives us the following three reasons:

I. God's Precept.

- A. Contentment is charged as a duty. (Hb. 13:5)
 - 1. God's Word is *a sufficient warrant* in itself; it has authority in it and must be a sacred spell to remove our discontent. God's Word must be the lodestar that guides us, His will the weight that moves our obedience. His fiat is a law and has majesty enough in it to captivate us into obedience.

II. God's Promise.

- A. God has promised and pledged to provide our necessary provisions. (Hb. 13:5)
- B. True faith takes God's promise without calling for witnesses. (Je. 49:11)

III. God's Decree.

- A. Whatever our condition is, *God, the great Arbiter of the world, has decreed that condition for us* and by His providence has ordered all the things that go along with it. The Christian should often think to himself, “God, the all-wise, has placed me here, for though my outward circumstances change, the God who changes not will keep me.” (Ps. 130:5, 6)

- B. Therefore, *esteem lightly the immediate experience of providence*, how it looks like and how it feels to your flesh, and *look instead to God's superintending decree* which has determined all things. God's providence, however dark and painful, is nothing but the carrying out of God's good and wise decree. God has put us where we are and he has done it in wisdom.
- C. We often wrongly *imagine that a different condition of life would be better for us*, that our portion for God is somehow less than we deserve or worse than it ought to be. But in fact, if it were us meting out the portion, we would have the worst and least of it.
 - 1. Lot chose Sodom. Abraham cried out for Ishmael. The disciples wept for Christ's departure.
 - 2. Left to our choice comforts, we would give ourselves the worst and deny ourselves the best. Far better then for us to rest content in the hands of God's providence.
- D. Knowing that God's decree determines and his providence disposes all things occur in the world *should work our hearts to a holy contentment*.
 - 1. *The wise God has ordered our condition*. If he sees that it is better for us to abound, then we shall abound. And if he sees that it is better for us to be without, then we shall be without. We must be content with his disposal.
 - 2. *For God sees in His infinite wisdom that the same condition does not fit all*. What is good for one will be bad for another. One condition of life will not fit every man any more than one suit of clothing will fit each person's body.
 - a) God brings one man low because he has more faith and patience to bear it. He can gather grapes from thorns and pick comforts from the cross. But not everyone can do this.
 - b) God puts another man in a high place giving him the skill and judgment to use his position wisely—and assigns him a weightier judgement. Only God knows what is best for each.
- E. One man desires health, but God gives him sickness because he will bring him to health out of sickness. Another man desires liberty but God gives him restraint because he will give him spiritual liberty by physical restraint. When he is sick, God will enlarge his heart in the way of His commandments.
- F. Discontentment with that which God has ordered in his sovereign wisdom and providence is not the heart of a child of our good heavenly Father, but a rebel heart near unto devils.