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CONTENTMENT

Has there ever been a time in human history when there was so much restlessness as there is today? One would very much doubt it, discontent is everywhere, no section of the community is exempt. Despite the boasted progress, the vast increase in incomes, higher standards of living, shorter working hours, longer periods of leisure, yet almost everybody is dissatisfied. This is undoubtedly the spirit of this age, and we as God's people need to be on our guard lest we become affected.

"CONTENTMENT". Is such a thing realizable or is it just an ideal, or the dream of a poet? Is it a possibility on earth, or is it a thing restricted to heaven? If such a thing is possible on earth surely it is dependant upon circumstances, therefore is not a permanent thing, is it not bound to alternate?

These are questions which can and do arise in our minds. The Word of God has a lot to say on this subject of contentment, we might first think on the words written in PHIL.4.V 11-12. These verses are concerning the Apostle Paul who says "Not that I speak in respect of want; I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content". The force of this statement can only be appreciated as we are acquainted with the conditions and circumstances at the time in which it was spoken. The Apostle was not on a Mediterranean holiday, neither was he being entertained in a luxurious home by some great and notable Christian, enjoying wonderful fellowship, indeed not for he was "IN BONDS" PHIL.1.V.13. "A PRISONER" EPH.4.V.1. "BOUND WITH THIS CHAIN" ACTS. 28.V.20. Later on, not only is he chained, but is treated as a malefactor 2.TIM.2.V.9. Most of his friends had left him, some of necessity, but others like Demas who forsook "having loved this present world" 2.TIM.4.V.10. for it was perilous at this time to show sympathy with such a one as the Apostle. "None stood with me" he says in verse 16. All they that be in Asia be turned away from me in 2.TIM.1.V.15. Verse 11 of 2.TIM.4. gives us just a little glimpse into the loneliness of the heart of this great man "Only Luke is with me" says he as he shivered in a Roman dungeon, he then goes on in verse 13 to ask Timothy to bring him his cloak (doubtless because of the cold) which he had left with Carpas in Troas. He also asked for some reading material, especially the parchments.

This just gives us some little idea of the circumstances of Paul when he wrote to the church at Philippi speaking of

contentment, for this epistle was actually written from prison, or more probably dictated by him and written by someone else, for Paul himself was chained. Notwithstanding all this he said "I am content", I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. PHIL.4.V.12. This was not theory to the Apostle, it was actual experience. This contentment was not due to the fact that he had a calm placid disposition, the first verses of both chapters 8 and 9 of the Acts soon shatter such a thought; No says Paul "I have learnt to be content", it has not come naturally, neither did it come suddenly. He does not say I have had a second blessing or a baptism of the Spirit and therefore contentment is mine, no no, I have learnt it says he, it came in my education in the school of life under the discipline and tuition of the Almighty.

So we see at once that Paul's contentment did not come from without, but from within, and was nothing to do with circumstances or with the gratification of natural desires.

Perhaps we should endeavour to analyse the word contentment in its Biblical sense; which simply means to be satisfied with the dealings and providence of a Sovereign God, or put in another Scriptural setting, it is the opposite to the clay murmuring to the Potter saying "Why hast thou made me thus"? The contented man does not complain at his lot, but rather gives thanks that his circumstances are no worse than they are, he counts his blessings and thanks God for them. Instead of greedily desiring more than he at present needs, he rejoices in the fact that God cares for him, in the words of HEB.13.V.5. "He is content with such things as he has". It would doubtless be true to say that one of the fatal hindrances to contentment is covetousness, this is the canker which eats at the roots of satisfaction. The Lord had good reason to give to His followers the solemn word of LK.12.V.15. "Take heed and beware of covetousness". This was but a reminder of the 10th Commandment.

Few things are more insidious than covetousness, it is so easy for the affection to be set more on the material than the spiritual, the language, of the covetous heart is always, more, it makes no difference if he has little or much, he still craves for more. How vastly different to the great Apostle who in 1.TIM.6.V.8. says "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content". Probably one of the most needed words in our generation is that of LK.3.V.14. "Be content with your wages".

To go a little deeper into our subject; Discontent though perhaps we do not realize it is a grievous and sinful thing, for it casts a shadow over the goodness and providence of God, it is a questioning of His wisdom, for since He orders all the circumstances of our lives then ought we not to be entirely-satisfied with the state and situation in which He has placed us, to murmur, is to take issue with God's sovereignty. Of course Biblical contentment does not mean fatalistic indifference, but it does mean a holy composure of mind, to rest in the Lord and in His perfect will, to be pleased and happy with what pleases Him, to be satisfied with the portion which He, who knoweth all things has allotted to us.

Furthermore, a discontented Christian cannot really pray, for discontent silences the lips of supplication, it destroys the spirit of submission. In true prayer we submit our wills and understanding to Divine wisdom, realizing that we know not what is best, so we leave it with God and to His good pleasure. To come to God in prayer harbouring in our hearts a spirit of complaint and discontent indicates to the Almighty an unwillingness to be subject to His perfect will, it portrays a leaning to our own understanding. To approach a Sovereign God in this spirit is a very dangerous thing to do, never let us forget the example of Rachel who in discontent said "Give me children or I die" GEN.30.V.1. but the sequel to this request is intensely solemn, she had children but died in childbirth GEN.35. V.16-19. Again let us recall Israel, who, "Lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tempted God in the desert and God gave them their request but sent leanness into their souls", PSA.106.V.14~15. Never let us forget that God not only hears the words of our lips, but He also knows the silent murmuring of our hearts. Such an attitude too will stifle the voice of thanksgiving. One of the Puritans said that "Discontent corrodes the strings of the heart, and therefore arrests all happy endeavour". The scriptures say we are to "Give thanks always for all things unto God and, the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".EPH.5.V.20. It is only the tranquil contented soul who can give thanks always for all things, this does not come naturally or suddenly it did not with Apostle Paul, it had to be learnt. To quote the Puritans yet again, "It is our duty to have the scales of our heart so equally poised in all God's dealings with us, as that they rise not in prosperity, nor sink in adversity. As the tree bendeth this way or that way with the wind yet still keeps its place, so we should yield accordingly to the gales of Divine providence, yet still continuing steadfast, retaining our piety, and remaining content". Let us settle in

our minds once for all that the "High and Lofty One" makes no mistakes, His understanding is infinite, His resources are limitless, His providence is perfect, He knows far better than we do, what is for our ultimate wellbeing, then let us never pit our puny reasons against the dealings of Jehovah, for has not a Sovereign God the indisputable right to do as He will in the ordering of our affairs. It is not within the design of the Eternal to give to all alike, we are all individuals and unique, and God in His sovereign pattern deals differently with each of us, and every circumstance of life has its reason and purpose in the mind and hand of the Master Potter "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 dunghill to set them among princes" 1.SAM.2.V.7-8. Dare we question or quarrel with the Most High, "Woe unto him that striveth with his maker ... Shall the clay say to Him who fashioneth it, What makest Thou?" IS.45.V.9. Rather may we emulate the Psalmist who said "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us, Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased". PSA.4.V.6-7. Walking in the light of God's countenance is a sure cure for discontentment, Great peace have they which love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them. PSA.119.V.165.

The Christian who loves the law of God and rests in the will of God will never be offended at the dealings of his maker. To refer to HEB. 13.V.5 again "Be content with such things as ye have; for He hath said I will never leave thee nor forsake thee". So often discontent arises from a «suspicion that our material future is insecure, or of a lower standard than others, such disquietude is dishonouring to God, for He hath said "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, this is the guarantee not only of God's presence, but also of His providence and His protection. Not at any time or under any circumstances conceivable or inconceivable, will God forsake one of His own. These words were spoken first to Joshua in JOSH. I.V.5. and have been proved by the saints of all generations for the needs of believers are the same in all ages, the promises are not only unto us but to our children ACTS.2.V.39« We can with absolute confidence declare with Abraham "God will provide" GEN.22.V.8. with Jonathan "There is no restraint to the Lord" 1.SAM.14.V.6. with Jehoshaphat "None is able to Withstand Thee". 2.CHRON.20.V.6. with Paul "If God be for us who can be against us". ROM.8.V.31. These promises are as the God who gave them - ETERNAL.

The abiding presence of the Lord ensures God's providence and His protection, therefore we should be content, for contentment is basically the product of a heart resting in God, it is the outcome of our will being brought into subjection to His will, it is the assurance that God is making all things work together for our ultimate good.

Contentment is only possible as we realize and accept that everything which enters our lives is fashioned by the hand of Him who is too wise to err, too good to be unkind, and will never cause one of His children a needless tear. This is an experience which has to be learnt, and it can only be known as we "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God". ROM.12.V.2.

The great Apostle to the Gentiles had learnt it well in a hard school and as he shivered chained in a Roman dungeon awaiting execution he said "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. PHIL.4.V.11. Again from the same cell he wrote "Godliness with contentment is great gain" 1.TIM.6.V.6.

W.H.M.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & INFORMATION.

As once again we look back over another quarter, our hearts are full of gratitude and thanksgiving to God for His goodness to us in all things. The past months have brought quite heavy expenses but through the exercise of heart, and giving of His people, our needs have been amply met. ... The Annual Bible Convention was a time of great profit and encouragement. Did we not all return home that day overawed with worship and praise at the sense of His presence and power, as His Word was ministered to us? It was such a joy to have a good representation of other Christians with us, (some for the first time) many spoke, and some have since written expressing their appreciation of the fellowship and ministry. We continue to pray for God's servant Mr Watts in his labours and look forward to his visit to us again in September D.V.

By the time that this is in print the "Drive-In" Church services should be well under way. The need and responsibility is tremendous, we need the help of everyone. May we be kept true and faithful in all things that through us. His Sovereign

purposes may be accomplished. To this end may the blessing of God rest upon this witness. It will be a great pleasure to have brethren with us from further afield during these coming months, many are old friends, some with us for the first time, may their ministry in Bideford be accompanied with much blessing. Again, we have some short series of addresses on Thursday evenings, and the teaching ministry on Sunday mornings on "Spiritual Union" will continue, except when a visiting preacher is with us for the day. Our brother Mr Bridge continues steadfastly in the work of distributing Christian literature throughout Bideford and district. In this he is most systematic, both as to coverage, and booklets left. All this is undertaken as a church activity, and our prayers should be daily with him as he engages in this somewhat lonely work of "Sowing beside all waters".

On the subject of literature, through the help and cooperation of Mr John Dallyn we had for the first time at our Annual Bible Convention, our own bookstall of sound conservative evangelical literature. The sales amounted to nearly £30's-worth of books and booklets - a very valuable additional means of making known the truth of God's Word.

These past months have also brought bereavement. Our hearts were sad as on Monday 17th May we assembled for the funeral of our beloved sister Miss Doris Sinner. One in whose life the grace of God had been so manifest. Her presence and Godly influence will be greatly missed in the fellowship, but we rejoice together that she is now "At home with the Lord".

By the time that this is in print no doubt all will be aware of the fact that Mr & Mrs Bryan Molland and family will be moving to the Tiverton district. As a church we are all very sad about this, we shall miss them tremendously, and the many niches which they have so willingly filled will certainly leave gaps in our ranks; although they wish us to know that they certainly will not be severing all their links with North Road, (which has a very special place in their hearts), but will be returning whenever possible to renew fellowship in what has been to them a real spiritual home. Nevertheless, their responsibilities in the assembly they will have to relinquish. We assure them of our love at this time and the continued prayers of the fellowship, that they may know both the guidance and keeping of God, as well as His presence and blessing. May He in His Sovereign ordering of all things undertake for them, and for us, and raise up those who are likeminded to come amongst us to fill the breaches and maintain and strengthen the witness.