

# THE SECRET OF BEING CONTENT

We live in what can truly be called an "age of discontent." While it is typical in a materialistic culture to think that contentment is related to physical things, there are signs that indicate that being content is not primarily related to material wellbeing. Sometimes, it seems those who have the most are also the most discontent. From a psychological viewpoint, being or not being content is more internally than externally conditioned.

Viktor Frankl in his monumental "Man's Search For Meaning" recorded his observations of how people thrived in a concentration camp under Hitler. He concluded that internal calm and good spirit were dependent on the quality of meaning to which an individual was dedicated. It was also his conviction that the highest quality of meaning is spiritual in nature.

It is probably true that for most of us, seeking to be content will be less than a perfect process. Even though Paul says he had learned to be content in all conditions (Phil. 4:11), he made this comment toward the end of his life. Earlier, he was evidently not there yet when he was pressing the Lord to heal him, and the Lord refused his request telling Paul that the only thing he had to have was God's grace, and he already had that (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

When Paul spoke of having learned to be content in every situation, the Greek term he used was AUTARKES. Vine says that this word means to be "self-sufficient, adequate, needing no assistance" (An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, p. 234). I believe our word "satisfied" may sum up the true meaning of this word.

Paul said he had to learn to be content, and it was probably no easier for him than it is for us. When the Lord told Paul that he already had all that he truly needed in the Grace by which he stood spiritually approved before God, I think He pinpointed the way to being content for all of us. Any effort on our part to find fulfillment and satisfaction in this material world is doomed to failure. The effort to do so inevitably leads to grumbling, and complaining because there are needs at the core of our being which can only be fulfilled when we are at peace with God. Hence, God's statement to Paul affirming that the only thing we just have to have is His GRACE.

The truth of the matter is that God has also provided for us materially in an abundant way. This marvelous world was created to fulfill our physical needs. If God had His way, I think everyone would be well fed

and clothed. Think of all those special elements God has made which we call medicine. As our scientists continue to make medicines available to us in an effort to combat all our illnesses, they are only discovering those elements that have all been present since the beginning of creation.

Christians learn to be content in all circumstances as they grow in His grace. In a sense, it may be said that Christianity is a religion of contentment! When soldiers asked John the Baptist what they were to do, he told them to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14). Jesus told people of His day who were burdened with anxiety about material things that life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. He encouraged them to learn from the way God provides for the birds, and the lilies, keeping in mind that He has even more care for man made in His own likeness. Then, He promised that those who seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness, will also receive the necessary material provisions of life (Matthew 6:24-34).

The Hebrew writer exhorts that we "be free from the love of money, & be content with what we have" (13:5). Paul states that just as we brought nothing material into the world at our birth, that at our death, we will take nothing material with us. Therefore, he says that "if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content." (1 Tim. 6:8).

We see then that being content is a very basic issue because it has to do with whether or not we have faith in God. Do we really believe that God will keep his Word? The Hebrew writer says there are two irrevocable reasons for which we must believe in God's promises: first, because it is God who has promised, and second, because God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:13-20). Paul tells the Romans that God's word remains true even when no one believes it, "Let God be found true, through every man be found a liar" (Romans 3:4).

When Jesus came into the world, He came from God the Father on a mission of love. He came to fulfill all the unfulfilled promises of God. For this reason, Paul writes, "For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us---by me and Silvanus and Timothy---was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him they are yes." (1 Cor. 1:19-20).

In this same vein Peter writes, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become

partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Pet. 1:2-4).

What we are saying is that God has bound Himself by His divine power to be true to all the promises He has made through Christ. So, when Christ announced that while others come to us for selfish purposes (to steal and to kill), He had come to give us abundant life (John 10:10). Paul emphasizes that the God-centered life "holds promise for the present life, and also for the life to come" (1 Tim. 4:8).

The following verses show how the "precious promises" of God lead us to inner peace and contentment. The few presented are only indicative of that much greater number of promises that are found in Scripture.

1. God has promised that we can depend on Him to always be with us as our shield & defender. "For He Himself has said, I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you, so that we can confidently say, the Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What shall man do to me?"

2. God has promised that He will keep watch on what is happening to us, and will deliver us from situations that would destroy us. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor. 10:13).

3. God has promised that He will work through all situations of life, both good and bad, to bring blessings to us. "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8:28).

4. God has promised us peace in the midst of turmoil. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:6-7).

5. God has promised us deliverance from the "poor pitiful Pearl complex." He promises us joy in trial, by making trial the very vehicle by which steadfastness and endurance will be developed in our lives. "Consider it all joy my brethren, when you encounter various trial, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing." (James 1:2-4)

6. God has promised that by His power, we will be able to do all things He calls upon us to do. Paul assures us, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (Phil 4:13). And in a much more grandiose manner, we are promised even the ripest human imagination cannot approach the dimensions of that which God is capable of doing through willing subjects. "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever, Amen." (Eph. 3:20-21).

7. And finally, we have His promise that He is fully committed to continue with us as a partner in our struggles throughout life until we arrive successfully at that home He has prepared for us. As Paul wrote to the Philippians, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." (1:6). To the Corinthians Paul states, "the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 1:6-8). And as a kind of a capstone, we have the promise given through Jude, the brother of the Lord, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever, Amen." (Jude 24-25).

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