

Sermon to the Saints of God which are at Topeka – Sunday, June 21, 2015

But godliness with contentment is great gain. – 1Tim. 6:6

Beloved, this is a fascinating, and instructive, turn of a phrase nestled down here in 1Tim.

Gill: Contentment of mind naturally follows upon Joy and Peace; where joy abounds, and peace rules in the heart, contentment is; it is nowhere to be found but in a godly man; in Christians of the first rank and class: the heathens talked much of it, but were not found in the practice of it; and, indeed, few men are - an ungodly man is an utter stranger to it; the ungodly are like a troubled sea, never at rest. Contentment is a branch of true godliness, or rather a super addition to it; which makes it greatly ornamental and profitable; for "godliness, with contentment," is great gain.

There is no godliness without contentment (some might erroneously read that they must ‘snap on’ contentment to godliness, if they were to receive ‘great gain.’), and there is no contentment without godliness (as any definition of contentment, outside of godliness, is not scripturally viable, and therefore of no interest to us), and yet the two are not strictly synonymous. Godliness is that which produces spiritual contentment – it is an outcome – the necessary outcome of godliness. So let us now consider the concept of contentment, as a result of godliness – and discontentment as the enemy of godliness, and a product of faithlessness.

One way at getting to the meat of the matter of what contentment is, is by looking at sentiments, or frames of mind, that seem at polar odds with such a state. So let’s look at some of them (those who read with my house on Saturdays helped put this list together):

Contention

Contention is the enemy of all that is godly, and a contentious spirit is evidence of discontentment:

As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife. – Pro. 26:21

But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God. - 1Co. 11:16

A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike. – Pro. 27:15

I believe strongly that the scriptures bear out the following proposition: if two people, who both claim a sincere fear and love of the Lord for themselves, and thereby a godly love for one another, are involved in some sharp contention, then AT LEAST one of them (perhaps both, but at the minimum, one) has some wrong thinking going on. There is no argument for or plausible scenario in which two of God's elect are at odds with each other and both be justified (by scripture and therefore sound doctrine, alone). Consider the scripture:

Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; - Act 15:35-39

They had an argument about whether John Mark should go with them to do that very important work for the Lord. And the situation whereby John Mark had left them before, spoken through Luke of the Holy Spirit, is contained in the following:

So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. - Act 13:4-13

So John Mark (who incidentally was the Mark through who the Holy Spirit penned the account of Christ's ministry on this earth that is called, appropriately, the book of Mark) had been on missionary travels with Paul and Barnabas, specifically in the capacity of ministering to them (and that means sometimes helping them with stuff, or getting them stuff, and sometimes just being around in case they might need something). John Mark (and everyone else who was around) saw that astounding testimony of God's power in that the Roman deputy of the isle of Paphos (and surrounding country) believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord – and seeing the power of God work through Paul in blinding the gainsaying sorcerer Elymas who had withstood, or spoken against, Paul's words of sound doctrine. Right there on the spot all that happened. Then it looks like Paul and the others went on to do more good preaching and stuff for God, and John Mark left – after all that goodness, departing from them to go back to Jerusalem. Maybe to see his mom. Maybe because he was homesick. Maybe because he was weary in well doing. Maybe he was just kinda spiritually immature at the time and didn't fully comprehend what was going on. In any event, the Holy Spirit of God makes it clear to us, through Luke (who was the vessel in the penning of the Acts), at chapter 15 verse 38, that John Mark had departed from them, and **had not gone with them to the work.**

Perhaps Paul's position was that John Mark evidenced a lack of dependability by leaving off from them before, or perhaps a spiritual immaturity by doing so. And maybe Paul thought that Barnabas' choice of John Mark was rooted in the familial flesh – that he was a respecter of persons in this case, in deciding to bring John Mark because it was his sister's boy, instead of choosing him because he would be particularly helpful and someone they both could count on, even in dicey situations that might arise. And perhaps Barnabas' position was that, even if John Mark had abandoned his post previously, that it was wrong for Paul to hold that against him still, and that maybe John Mark had learned a lesson and needed a chance at proving that he could be more dependable help. Or maybe Barnabas was just insisting on John Mark because of the familial flesh. And there are more combinations and possibilities out there, but the point is, that there is no way that the sharp contention that existed between them was justified by a position of scriptural soundness in both of them as to this issue. At least one of them, and possibly both of them, had wrong thinking going on here.

Some might say, that's the way the Lord worked it out, and they both did good preaching on the heels of it, so they were both justified in their position. They just agreed to disagree in this case (a phrase that has no business being uttered in spiritual circles). That position proves too much. That everything happens by the providential dealing of God is no argument against wrong-thinking, bad behavior and sin. Again I say, if two of God's people are in sharp

contention with one another, then at least one of them, and possibly both of them (but not necessarily both) has wrong-thinking going on.

Pride

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. – Ps. 10:4

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. – Pr. 8:13

But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. – Jas. 4:6

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. – Pr. 14:12

Pride is that which caused the fall of Satan. It is a supremely evil thing – and we are all susceptible to it. It is particularly sneaky – the proud man proudly lives in denial of his pride, and prides himself on the wafer thin veneer of self-effacement and humility that he thinks cloaks his swelling, vile pride. Pride can be loud, but the proudest person in the room can be the most quiet – silently stewing in their pride. A proud man cannot bear that any should be above him, or upon a footing with him; and when he observes this, it gives him uneasiness, and fills him with disquietude and discontent; Mordecai's not bowing to Haman made the latter uneasy and discontented, even in the midst of the profusion of other honors conferred upon him. The proud man always wants more. Alexander the Great is said to have sat down and cried after having conquered the whole world as he thought, because there was not another world to conquer.

*BTW – that Proverbs 14:12 is nearly identically repeated in Proverbs 16:25, the only difference is the word 'which' is replaced by the word 'that.' We can be sure that if the same idea is repeated, inside the same book, then it is something for us to take particular note of. I used to think that this verse applied to everyone who outwardly believes different than a tulip Christian – Buddhists, Hindus, atheists, Catholics, etc. To be sure, it does, but I believe that this verse also applies to us when our thinking in any way, usually in our pride, is out of line with the scripture. We must be watchful and on our guard against leaning on our own understanding, making broad occasion for the flesh, and mixing carnal reasoning with spiritual - being blinded in our pride by the idea that since we generally believe the right things, that

our way of thinking in a particular area, especially one that personally affects us, is the right way to go.

Covetousness (Jealousy)

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. – Heb. 13:5

A covetous man cannot truly be a content man; he cannot be content with what he has, he always wants more. The Greek word for "covetousness" is pleonexia, "a having" or a desire to "have more"; while there is a lawful desire of having more in some cases and for some good ends and purposes, and in submission to the will of God; it is an anxious, immoderate, and unbounded desire of more which is criminal – especially an inordinate desire to possess that which can never properly or lawfully be yours (like your neighbor's house or your neighbor's wife). An awful lot of sin is bound up in covetousness, or the wanting of stuff and situations that can never properly be yours. Also, covetousness runs constant interference in the heart and mind of a man, as it constantly whispers that what you want for yourself is better than what God has given you. There can be no contentment where covetousness exists.

Unthankfulness and Disobedience

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. – Rom. 1:21

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things (whoremongering, uncleanness, covetousness, idolatry) cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. – Eph. 5:6

If you are not walking around with a heart filled with thanksgiving – not in the abstract – but a day-in, day-out, practical giving of thanks to God, then you are discontent. And I mean continually, for giving you breath of life, as the potter doing what he wills with the helpless clay, being formed into whatever the potter desires. That's you. That's me. And you cannot be said to be thankful while at the same time being willfully disobedient – ignorantly disobedient, maybe. But willful disobedience – not a chance. Without real thanksgiving and obedience, contentment is impossible.

Anxiety of Mind or Distress – worry

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? – Mat. 6:25

And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? – Luk. 12:25

This is a biggy, it wells up in nearly all of us frequently – and it is absolutely on the other end of the spectrum from contentment. It is easy to seem content, or even think yourself to be content, when in a state of temporal prosperity. But this is not necessarily contentment, this very well could be just saying “I got what I want right now” – contentment is living in godly recognition of the promises, power, authority, sovereignty of God in various states of temporal well-being – in other words, regardless of your lot and in recognition that your lot is designed by God for your greatest and best good, and that it glorifies God’s name in a way that is well-pleasing to his sight. And when a person has worked themselves up into distress, they will generally chafe at a person who seems in an easier place situationally while reminding them of this danger. So watch out for that. Comparing lots and situations is unthankful, covetous and exalts our own reasoning above the will of God.

Murmuring

And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD. – Ex. 16:8

These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. – Jude 1:16

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. – Pro. 16:25

Murmuring is extremely dangerous – whether subtle or blatant, it is the act of whipping oneself into a frenzied, carnal state of complaint and disapproval over what God has appointed to you. When we murmur about any part of our lot, we do two very dangerous things:

1. We either kick at, or deny, the sovereignty of God. We kick at it when we say it's not right – that we should be in a different situation; why did you put me in this situation, Lord? Don't you know that I don't like it?
2. We exalt our reasoning above that of our Creator – the Author and Finisher of our faith – the maker of all things, seen and unseen, and the omnipotent and omniscient Bishop of our souls. When we murmur, we are literally saying that we know better than God about what situation we should be in, forgetting some very fundamental scriptural concepts:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. - Rom_8:28

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Rom. 8:35-39

How does a man come to true contentment? The answer lies in the proof text for this sermon:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. – 1Tim. 6:6

Man is naturally a discontented creature - discontentment was bound up in the cause of the fall of our spiritual parents; Eve was prompted by the tempter to ambition, to be wise as gods, and that seemed desirable to her. It was the 'objection handler' that Satan used to close the sale.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to

make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. – Gen. 3:1-6

Gill: Such was their ambition, prompted to it by the tempter, that they affected to be as God; or however, perceiving there was a class of creatures superior to them, more wise and knowing, they could not be content with their present case and circumstances; but wanted to be upon an equality with them; and being told, that by eating the forbidden fruit they would attain to it, took and eat of it, and thus by coveting an evil covetousness, lost the happiness which they had; hence it is most truly said of man, that he is, "at his best estate, altogether vanity", #Ps 39:5...You will not find contentment in a natural or unregenerate man; such a man is always uneasy and disquieted; as restless as the troubled sea, and the waves thereof; let him be in pursuit of what he may, he never arrives to it to satisfaction; is it wisdom and knowledge he seeks after, as his first parents did? he gets no content; but finds, that in much wisdom is much grief and vexation of spirit; and that, by an increase of knowledge sorrow is increased. Is it pleasure in the gratification of the senses? these are soon palled with it, and new pleasures are wanting; and these, when had, like the former, issue in bitter reflections and remorse of conscience. Is it worldly honour, fame, and applause of men? these are fickle, transitory things, not to be depended on, and seldom last long; Or is it wealth and riches? these are very uncertain and unsatisfying things, as has been observed. There is nothing can satisfy the mind of man but God himself; and if a man lives without God in the world, let him have what he will, he lives a discontented life; none but a godly man is a contented man; there may be content with godliness, but without it there is none.

Contentment is a thing that we learn, but not by way of carnal reason, and not as a theory; but practically and experientially - and by a train of experiences, and generally through a series of afflictive providences; so that it is learned in a far different way than a carnal man can ever conceive of. Afflictions and persecutions are the very things which breed discontent in others and they are avoided at all costs, but they are generally the very means of producing true contentment in gracious souls.

Gill: The apostle Paul learned to be content, not only "in", but "by", the adverse providences which attended him; by his dangers at sea and by land; by his distresses, afflictions, and persecutions for Christ's sake; and so other saints have been instructed in some measure, in the same way, and have found it true, what the apostle says at Rom. 5:4 "Tribulation works patience", etc. in such afflicted and experienced souls; and from all this flows contentment.

Here is some overpowering evidence to consider in helping to put on the mind of Christ, and thereby move our minds and hearts to true contentment:

First, the consideration in what state we came into the world; and what we shall have when we go out of it; which is just nothing at all:

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. - 1Ti. 6:7, 8

This is the argument the apostle uses to promote contentment in himself and others; it's everything we need now, and it's more than we'll carry with us when we quit this world, and it's not at all needed in the world to come. It is spiritual reasoning that finally confessed Job's contentment with the loss of all he had:

And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. - Job 1:21

When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. – Ec. 5:11-16

Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. – Ps. 49:16-17

Second, the unalterable will and sovereignty of God is a line of thinking that brings a God-fearing man into contentment. *Gill: He does everything according to his will, as in the armies of the heavens, so among the inhabitants of the earth; he gives to everyone their portion in this life as he thinks fit. What they have is not to be attributed to their wisdom and sagacity, and to their diligence and industry, however commendable these may be; but is to be ascribed to the sovereign will and pleasure of God, who does all things "after the counsel of his will", in the wisest and best manner; and therefore men should be content; and after all, they cannot make things otherwise than they are; for "who can make that straight which he hath made crooked?" And no man, with all his care and thought, "add one cubit to his stature", or make any change in his condition and circumstances, than what is according to the will of God.*

Third, we are completely unworthy to enjoy the least favour and mercy at the hand of God, and that yet he shows us great favor, should engage us to be content with our lots.

I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. - Gen 32:10

If God was to deal with us according to what we are deserving of, we should be stripped of all; and, it is specifically by the Lord's tender mercies toward us we are not consumed; and therefore have great reason to be content; since we merit nothing, have forfeited all, and cannot claim anything as our due; what we enjoy is pure favor.

The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. – Ps.145:8-10

Fourth, consider the great things which God has done for us, and therefore what we should be thankful for – a framing up of our prayer of thanksgiving all the day long. If we recollect the benefits of every kind which God has blessed us with, that will tend us greatly toward contentment - giving thanks unto his name. Thanksgiving is a state which we should constantly live in, and thanksgiving breeds contentment.

Fifth, how can we be but content when we focus on and saturate the mind in the great and precious promises of God?

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. – Heb. 13:5

And again,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Rom. 8:35-39

They that fear the Lord shall lack no good thing; God will supply all our need - the Lord's grace is sufficient for us. What discontentment can trump that?

Sixth, eternal glory and happiness, which is promised, prepared, and laid up for the saints, and which we will most certainly enjoy if we be his, should serve to make us content with present things, and even with some things that are not agreeable to the flesh;

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. – Jn. 14:2

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. – Heb. 11:24-26

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. – Lk. 16:25

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. -1Co. 15:51-58

We shall be fully satisfied when we awake in the divine likeness; and therefore for the present should be content with our lot and portion.

Seventh, the saints and people of God have all things in hand - God has given us all things richly to enjoy; all things pertaining to life and godliness, both grace and glory; and what more can be desired? Christ is our Saviour and Redeemer from sin, Satan, the curse of the law, and wrath to come; he is our Mediator and Peacemaker, our Prophet, Priest, and King. All that belongs to him is ours; his righteousness is ours (it is imputed), for justification; his blood is ours, to cleanse and pardon our sin; his fullness ours, to supply our wants; he is ALL in ALL unto us, and should be a matter of great contentment.

He sends His Spirit to help us to make known unto us the things that God freely gives us; he convinces us of sin, righteousness, and judgment; he illuminates us in the knowledge of divine things; he is our quickener, sanctifier and comforter; he is the earnest of our inheritance and

seal of our future glory; he begins, carries on and perfects the work of grace in us. That should be a matter of great contentment.

The covenant of grace is ours; made with us, and made for us; the blessings of it, the sure mercies of David; the blessings of grace and of glory, provided and laid up in it; the promises of it, both respecting this life and that which is to come, is ours.

The gospel, and the ordinances of it, and the ministers of it, are ours. Scripture is written for our use, for our learning and instruction, for our comfort and edification; and the ministers of it are our servants for Jesus's sake; all of which surely must add to divine contentment.

Lastly, he has given us life, without which we couldn't even have a brain to drunkenly stagger ourselves into a state of discontentment. NO life, no brain. No thoughts. No emotions. Everything that we have and are we owe unto God. He owes us nothing, and yet he gives and gives. We owe him everything and yet we are not satisfied.

Beloved, discontentment is a function of an immature spiritual outlook (which panders to the flesh), a function of becoming entangled with the affairs of this life, and a leaning on our own understanding. Contentment is a function of perfection, or a mature outlook toward our God. Living in full knowledge, understanding and appreciation for the concept that God is the Potter and we are but the clay.

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. - Job 1:1

Godliness and discontentment are oil and water, in all of discontentment's forms and with all of its indicia.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. – 1Tim. 6:6

Thank you for allowing me to talk to you this morning. I hope this has been instructive and edifying to the hearer.

I love you all.