

Peace and Contentment

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts . . . since you were called to peace” (Colossians 3:15).

“Finally brothers, aim for perfection . . . live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances . . . I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation . . . I can bear everything through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13).

“Be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5).

“Godliness with contentment is great gain . . . if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

A long time ago, my wife and I were going somewhere. I was driving, and my wife was sitting in the front passenger seat. Traffic was heavy, and I got agitated over something going on in the traffic. My wife said to me, “Let’s be content that we’ve got a car and we’re going to get there. Drive like you’re at peace with the world!” Let’s think about this.

God created Satan as a beautiful being, and he was given immense responsibilities at God’s throne in heaven. But he wasn’t content to be God’s trusted and splendid servant. He wanted more. He sought autonomy, authority and power. Grasping for more, attempting to gain that which was not his to have, evil entered God’s very good creation. The peace that pervaded heaven evaporated.

God, in contrast, is content to exist. God seeks nothing more for Himself, only to share the blessedness of His Being with others. The three Persons of the Godhead exist together eternally in perfect peace, having infinitely great love for each other and joy in each other’s presence. We, having been created in God’s image, which means to reflect God’s perfect nature, are to imitate God by being content with what God has provided and living in peace.

In the Garden, however, Adam’s wife wasn’t content with all the many different types of fruit that God had made available to them to eat. She yielded to the Serpent’s temptation and took what wasn’t hers to take. The man wasn’t content that God had provided him with everything he could need or want. He too wasn’t content with God’s provision. They suffered terribly as a consequence. And so do we.

David had Abigail as his wife. She was one of the most beautiful women ever. (The Bible, which deals with the most transcendent and ultimate of matters, mentions this!) Yet David wasn’t content to be with his gorgeous wife. He also had to have Bathsheba, someone else’s wife. David suffered terribly because of this.

Not content to do away with Mordecai, whom he hated (and which he had the power to do), Haman wanted to kill all the Jews in the world. That grasping for more was what did him in. Even the wicked aren’t content with the evil they seek to do.

In contrast, consider Paul. He knew what it was to be hungry, to be naked, to be in prison, to be whipped, to be opposed and hated by enemies of the Gospel, to be in danger of losing his life. Yet by the Spirit of God he writes that we should be content with our circumstances and be at peace. How is that possible? Here’s how: Paul knew that the risen Christ was present right there with him, in every situation. And he knew that something far greater than what we experience in this world awaits us in the future. We are destined to experience glory and blessing more wonderful than anything we can imagine. Paul was like God, and he is exhorting us to be like God. And not be like Satan.

Worldliness has as one of its main features a continual grasping for more. More of anything and everything. More money. More power. More greatness. More luxuries. More friends. More territory. More security. More Facebook “likes.” More excitement and thrills. More toys to play with. More freedom to indulge one’s lusts. More self-expression, self-gratification and self-righteousness – which means I’m right and you’re wrong. More, more, more. There can be no

peace when we're constantly seeking more. Life as God created it, as God intends it, isn't satisfying unless we're constantly, restlessly, in search of something more fulfilling.

Of course, when we're doing God's will, seeking more can be obeying God. Thus, seeking more converts to grow the church is certainly the right thing to do. Not being content with a quick prayer each morning but seeking instead to spend more time thru the day with God is certainly good. Paul wanted those in the churches he planted to be more knowledgeable of God and to be more holy and more mature. If the goal of some endeavor is to benefit others, then not being content with the way things are can certainly be good. Thus, for example, it's right to be dissatisfied with having to walk to a stream for fresh water; better would be a system that delivers water directly to our houses. It's right not to be content with outhouses if it's within our power to build a septic system. And new farming methods that produce more food for more people is good.

But consider the anguish people experience by not being content with their spouses, or with their children, or with their boss at work, or with people at their church. Or with their form of government. Or with having to take care of an invalid. Or with just staying at home and meditating on the Bible. Or with . . . hey, you can fill out the list, it's a very long list. Most of the problems in society are due to a lack of peace, peace with others and peace within our souls. I interpret the current social and political turmoil in our nation as either the infusion of Satanic discord or the result of a deliberate rejection of God and the blessing of peace that came from honoring Him.

Let's understand something: Not being content with our circumstances, not being at peace with others or experiencing inner peace, is our default condition. It's part of our sin nature. It's how we all are naturally; we're restless. The Bible has to exhort us to be content and to be at peace precisely because it's not the normal thing for us. We are by nature – by our sin nature, that is – malcontents. We're at war with each other and with God.

So, we have to think through everything that confronts us in life and put it in the context of living in God's presence, in view of God's special will for each of us, and in view of the future. We don't just go thru life reacting to situations. We need to be thoughtful and discerning. We need to think biblically, about *everything*. A terrible observation of modern society is that we're not thinking people. It's as if we actually don't want to think. Or don't know how.

Unbelievers cannot know peace. They only can experience a counterfeit type of peace that's the (temporary) suspension of hostilities. Peace comes with the Gospel (John 14:27; Acts 10:36; and many other places). It's a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). If a believer doesn't have peace or is discontent with circumstances, there's a problem! It's likely that believer is deliberately out of God's will, for example, is not serving Christ in some biblical way or is into idolatry of some sort, or is just plain immature. The peace that comes to us from Christ now is proleptic of the *shalom* that will pervade the whole world during the future Kingdom. It's an anticipation of the "rest" that God promised at the time of creation.

We in America live as if we are on an island, one of unique prosperity and security. We therefore have a grossly inadequate understanding of human existence. Others in the world – and people all thru history – know only war, slavery, oppression, poverty, injustice, chaos, criminality, filth, disease, and a host of other horrible circumstances in which they have to pass their life. Many believers in Christ today are in filthy prisons. Or they're suffering persecution in other painful ways. God is aware of all of this. And yet, His will for humanity is to be content and to be at peace. We're to reflect God's goodness *in spite of* the hideous or evil circumstances we may be in. If we're at peace with others, and if we're content with circumstances, that glorifies God.

This doesn't mean ginning up courageous grit, as in, "I'm going to show how strong-willed I am." No way. If we're aware that the transcendent Creator God loves us, that He has saved us from deserved wrath and has joined us to the risen Christ so that we have the glorious future of enjoying His presence for an eternity. And if we're aware that a good God sovereignly and with flawless wisdom rules His cosmos. How then can we not have abiding joy and peace in our souls? A peace that fills us with contentment in whatever ugliness, shame, injustice, or difficulty we face going thru this life.

As political and social circumstances in America change for the worse, or as we think about the tough circumstances in our personal lives now (or that may soon come), may we learn these precious lessons of contentment and being at peace.