

Heb. 13:1-16

Contentment with What we Have – v. 5

In our last study we conducted a general survey of this final chapter of Hebrews and noted the concentration of exhortations that we find in chp. 13. *Let brotherly love continue* (v. 1); *Remember them that are in bonds* (v. 3); *Remember them which have the rule over you* (v. 7); *Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach* (v. 13). You see what I mean by a concentration of exhortations.

And it bears repeating that in order to gain the right incentive or motivation for giving heed to these exhortations it's very important that we note the connection between these exhortations and the theology behind them. *Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever* (v. 8). That's a theological statement. It tells us something about Christ. It tells us that he is immutable or unchangeable. *The God of peace* (v. 20) – there's another theological statement. *The blood of the everlasting covenant* (v. 20) – there's a very rich theological statement. And by understanding and meditating upon these truths about God and about Christ we will experience a fire of devotion being lit in our hearts and fanned to a blaze. And that fire of devotion or that fire of our love back to Christ will or should be the driving force for giving heed to all these exhortations throughout this epistle to the Hebrews.

This morning I want to zoom in in one of these exhortations. It's actually a two-fold exhortation that is found in v. 5. *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have*. I call it a two-fold exhortation that is expressed first negatively then positively. *Let your conversation (manner of life) be without covetousness* – there's the negative expression telling us what we want to be without or what we want to avoid. *And be content with such things as ye have* – there's the positive side of the exhortation which is very simply a call to contentment.

Contentment does not come naturally to the child of Adam. You might say that the whole reason sin gained entrance into the human race was because the devil convinced Eve that she shouldn't be content with what God had provided. She ought to desire more. The devil convinced her of that. And ever since the fall of man sinners have never truly found contentment. They may think they've found it for a brief time – but eventually fleshly lusts cry for more.

Contentment doesn't come naturally for the Christian either. Even the apostle Paul admitted that he had to learn this frame of soul – *I have learned* he writes in Phil. 4:11 *in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content*. We may think that we've learned contentment when we're in certain kinds of conditions – when we're in a state of good health we may think we've learned contentment. When we're in a state of good weather – we might think we've learned contentment – Or when everything is going smoothly – nothing has broken down, the bills are paid on time, and the prospects for the future

look bright – under these circumstances we are able to convince ourselves that we've learned contentment.

But Paul says he learned it in whatsoever state he found himself. Whether he was abased or whether he abounded – whether he was full – or whether he suffered from hunger – or whether he suffered need of any earthly kind – he had learned in all things to be content. And isn't it interesting that after he says he has learned contentment he could go on to say that he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him. I don't think he would be able to make such a statement had he not first been able to say that he had learned contentment in Christ in every circumstance of life.

I think it would be fair to say that our contentment is linked to our closeness to Christ. When we're close to Him – then come what may – our sense of purpose and well-being can't be shaken. But when we drift from Him and become dissatisfied with Him – then we discover eventually that satisfaction can't be found anywhere else.

The Jews in Haggai's time learned how difficult life could become without contentment. They had started out so well. They had returned to the promised land after the time of captivity in order to rebuild the temple. But eventually things became difficult and dangerous and eventually the work ground to a halt and when the book of Haggai opens we find that contentment has left the Israelites and so we read in Haggai 1:6 *Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages [to put it] into a bag with holes.*

What a picture of discontentment. And do you see how it didn't matter how hard they strove contentment still alluded them. What had happened? Haggai goes on to say that every man had run to his own house – to the neglect of the Lord's house – and as a result contentment couldn't be found – no matter what they did – or how much they applied themselves – contentment alluded them.

It's no wonder that in writing to Timothy, Paul tells him that *godliness with contentment is great gain*. When you think of what is encompassed by contentment then you can say amen to Paul's statement to Timothy. A man who's content has found satisfaction and purpose and meaning to his life. He's reigning in life rather than being ruled by his circumstances.

Now in the passage we've read this morning – we're given in v. 5 the exhortation to be content. *Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have*. And in what follows we're given an argument designed to bring contentment to our souls if we've lost that contentment. And we're given the means for regaining that contentment a few verses later if we've lost it.

Let's consider then in the remaining moments:

The Argument and the Means for Being Content

I. The Lord's Continual Presence is The Argument for Contentment -

This is the argument most directly linked to the exhortation to be content – *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.*

Notice from this verse that the exhortation is based specifically on what God has said or to a promise God has given *For he hath said.* And here again we see a relationship between exhortation and theology or perhaps more specifically in this verse – exhortation and promise.

Would you notice in this statement that mention is made of two categories – two headings that pertain to what we have. We have “things” – and we have Christ. It is sad to think that in our materialistic culture we place a very high premium on things. There are those who live, it would seem, for the sole purpose of accumulating things. Perhaps you've heard the saying that some time ago appeared on a bumper sticker that read something like this: “He who dies with the most toys wins.” The rationale behind that saying seems to be even more characteristic of our up and coming generation. Teenagers today have so many things. And what a teenager finds unbearable is the realization that others may have more things than they have. Everybody has a cell phone today. How is a young person expected to live without one?

And once a man or woman finds themselves engulfed in such thinking it doesn't take long to discover that things don't satisfy. Things don't meet the deep needs of your heart. And the solution to such thinking is not to be found in the accumulation of more things. For it doesn't matter how many things you have. A man's life does not consist, according to Christ in Lk. 12:15, in the abundance of the things that he possesses.

On the other hand – a man's life does consist in his knowing Christ. *And this is life eternal* Christ says in Jn. 17:3 *that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* The contrast between things and Christ is so great that it becomes insulting to Christ for us to place things above him.

And would you note from the text that unlike “things,” Christ is someone we have forever. *For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* What this promise of Christ conveys to us is that no matter what else we may not have we will always have Christ. There are so many things in this world that are transitory. You may have wealth for a time and then lose it. You may have health and then lose it. You may have status or prestige or popularity in the community and then lose it. But you can never lose Christ.

And if you never lose Christ – then you never lose life – you never lose righteousness – you never lose heaven – you never lose acceptance with God – you never lose His

grace or favor. When you consider the things that you may lose and compare them with the things you'll never lose then it's easy to say that you never really lose anything when you've gained Christ.

And yet – don't we have to sadly acknowledge that we go through seasons when Christ isn't enough to satisfy? The historical section in the Old Testament abounds with examples of the children of Israel becoming dissatisfied with God.

Even though they had been delivered from the cruel bondage of Egypt – the Israelites became dissatisfied with God. Even after he opened the Red Sea for them and then destroyed the Egyptian army which sought to pursue them – still they became dissatisfied with God. He provided manna for them – they were still unhappy. He provided a leader for them who walked closer to God to anyone – they were still dissatisfied.

At a later time in their history they desired a king. That in and of itself wouldn't be wrong because there was provision in the covenant for a king. But the narrative makes it plain that their reason for asking for a king was that they might be like the other nations. And so the Lord says to Samuel – *Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them* (1Sam. 8:7).

They were dissatisfied with God's rule. Human depravity being what it is – leads me to conclude that it's no different today – we can actually become dissatisfied with Christ. Our text traces the cause for such dissatisfaction. *Let your conversation be without covetousness* – we read.

Here is why we become dissatisfied with Christ – the strength of the flesh, and the pull of the world – the pride of life, you might say – lead us to become self-absorbed – so that we begin to say – sometimes even with regard to the Lord's service – *what's in it for me? How can I gain more? How can I climb higher up the ladder? Where can I find greener pastures?*

I find it encouraging, therefore, to note from our text that even when we fall into covetousness the promise still reads – *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*. Even when we become dissatisfied with Him – He stays with us – He doesn't forsake us. You would think that he would especially when we give him cause to but his promise remains steadfast and sure and we have assurance, therefore, that he will never leave us or forsake us. We may lose the sense of his presence for a time. You find an example of that in Job. But God was never far from Job nor is Christ ever far from us. He will never leave us or forsake us.

But the argument is strengthened even more by the realization that not only will our Savior be with us and never forsake us but notice in v. 6 what this enables us to say – *So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do*

unto me. Christ, you see, doesn't stand idly by in a disinterested way. His presence with us conveys to us his help for us.

I believe the hymn we sang this morning is based on this text. We sang in the third stanza of that hymn: *Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed, For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid; I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand.*

So we find the argument for contentment. Christ is with us And he's with us to help us. And if we have the assurance that He's with us then we may say with confidence or with *boldness* as our text says – *The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

And so if the Lord is with us, and he doesn't stand by idly to watch us struggle and strain but is interested in us at all times and his watchcare is constant and we never escape his view or his interest, then we can be confident that he will gird us up with his love and his grace. He will impart his strength to us and he will minister assurance to our souls that we're his and that he's ordering all things for our good.

And would you note in this connection what verse 8 says – *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.* If he has been our helper then he will be our helper. He's not the One who changes. If he has been gracious then he will be gracious. If he has forgiven our sins then he will forgive our sins. If he has been our God then he will be our God. What a strong argument for overcoming covetousness and being content with such things as we have.

But fickle sheep that we are – we find ourselves too often prone to wander. And so this leads to my next consideration. We've seen the argument for being content – let's think for a moment finally on:

II. The Means for Gaining Contentment

And I want to draw your attention once again this morning to what I said last week was foundational to all the exhortations of Hebrews. Look at what verse 9 says – *For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.* Here is how contentment is gained and maintained – the heart must be established with grace.

And how is the heart to be established with grace? The answer is that the heart is established with grace when we make good use of the means of grace. The means of grace, I'm sure you know, include time in the word, time in church in the practice of worship and time in prayer whether it be personal, family or the church prayer meeting. You are no doubt familiar with the exhortation of 4:16: *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.* Here is where we utilize the means of grace – before the throne of grace in worship or in prayer.

It's interesting to note the number of times the author of Hebrews makes reference to our boldness:

- Hebrews 4:16 *Let us therefore come **boldly** unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*
- Hebrews 10:19 *Having therefore, brethren, **boldness** to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,*
- Hebrews 13:6 *So that we may **boldly** say, The Lord [is] my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*

The reference in 10:19 gives us the grounds for our boldness or our confidence. It's the blood of Jesus that enables us to come boldly and to say boldly that the Lord is our helper.

He shed His blood for you and for me. There's how you know that He'll always be with you. He atoned for your sins – there's how you know He'll be your helper. He's entered into the Holy place of heaven as our forerunner *by His own blood – having obtained eternal redemption for us*. There's how you know you can approach the throne of God with boldness.

And it is as we avail ourselves of the wonderful privilege of going boldly to Him that we'll find grace and mercy to help our every need – and we'll also find contentment. I dare say that if you show me a Christian who's dissatisfied with life – he seems to be angry at the world and angry at his brethren – and all seems to be doom and gloom and despair and dismay – I'll show you a Christian who in all likelihood is neglecting the means of grace. He has failed to establish his heart with grace.

The reality of all the woes of this world seems to be the thing that captures and dominates his heart and consequently his heart is not established in grace. It's established rather in doom and gloom and despair.

We see an example in the Old Testament of Moses himself slipping into such a condition of dissatisfaction and despair. So we read the prayer of Moses in Numbers 11:15 *And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness*. What a vivid description of his despair – *let me not see my wretchedness*. Moses considered his spiritual condition worse than death itself and so he desired that God simply take him off the scene. He was so discouraged by what he saw. The children of Israel were bent on going one way while Moses was bent on going another way. They wanted Egypt – Moses wanted Canaan.

And when the weight of a man's burden becomes more real than the truth of God's favor – then we sink to a condition of spiritual wretchedness and it's a condition that leaves us in despair. It's the very opposite of the heart being established in grace. And from the Old Testament we come to learn that Moses knew this condition of

wretchedness. Elijah knew that condition. Jonah knew that condition. I think you could say that Paul knew that condition – so we find him saying at the end of Romans 7 *O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* And 3 of the 4 of these men at some point in their lives had the desire to leave this world to go home.

Under such conditions the promise that Christ is with him and will never forsake him means little to him because there's a sense in which he has forsaken Christ. He's governed more by sight than by faith. And you can't go long forsaking Christ and still maintain contentment. The solution in Numbers 11 for Moses was for his burden to be shared. And it's in that chapter that we read of the Lord taking from Moses the Spirit that was upon him and distributing it to 70 others.. This is why we must meet in the middle of the week for prayer – that we may bear one another's burdens.

The solution for Paul in Romans 7 was to know the blessed truth of his justification. The glorious truth that there was no condemnation would be the thing that would save Paul from the body of this death.

And so we need to go to Christ often to avail ourselves of His grace. We need to avail ourselves of every means of grace in order for our hearts to be established in grace. If we know and believe the truth that He is with us and will never forsake us then we'll have no trouble doing what verse 15 calls upon us to do – *By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.*

So much is at stake in this matter of contentment not only for the individual Christian but for the advancement of the cause of Christ. How much appeal do you suppose a discontented Christian has to the world? The sinner can go to any number of places to find despair and misery. But where can he go to find true contentment? We'll say to him, of course, that he can go to Christ. But how valid will our words be if we're not going to Christ and if we're not able to demonstrate that in whatever state we find ourselves we have learned to be content. We've learned to be content because we're sure that Christ is with us and is our helper.

Let's seek him then that we might be content with such things as we have – knowing that we have him. And in our seeking make sure you beseech him to deliver you from the covetousness that only serves to rob you of your portion in him and leaves you empty and bitter and leave you void of any kind of testimony for him. We have every reason to be content. May we utilize every means of grace at our disposal, then, so that we either maintain or regain contentment.