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(J. C. Ryle, "Be Content" 1885)

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with such things as you have, because God has said--Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

These words are very simple. A little child might easily understand them. They contain no high doctrine; they involve no deep metaphysical question; and yet, as simple as they are--the duty which these words enjoin on us, is of highest practical importance to all Christians.

Contentment is one of the rarest graces. Like all precious things--it is most uncommon. To practice contentment, is very hard. To talk of contentment in the day of health and prosperity is easy enough; but to be content in the midst of poverty, sickness, trouble, disappointments, and losses--is a state of mind to which very few can attain!

The fallen angels had heaven itself to dwell in, and the immediate presence and favor of God--but they were not content. Adam and Eve had the garden of Eden to live in, with a free grant of everything in it excepting one tree--but they were not content. Ahab had his throne and kingdom, but so long as Naboth's vineyard was not his--he was not content. Haman was the chief favorite of the Persian king--but so long as Mordecai sat at the gate--he was not content.

It is just the same everywhere in the present day. Murmuring, dissatisfaction, discontent with what we have, meet us at every turn. To say, with Jacob, "I have enough," seems flatly contrary to the grain of human nature. To say, "I want more," seems the mother tongue of every child of Adam.

Paul's direction ought to come with power to all our consciences: "Be content with such things as you have," not with such things as you once used to have--not with such things as you hope to have--but with such things as you now have. With such things, whatever they may be--we are to be content. With such a dwelling, such a family, such health, such income, such work, such circumstances as we now have--we are to be content.

Ah! reader, if you would be truly happy--seek it where alone it can be found. Seek it not in money, seek it not in pleasure, nor in friends, nor in learning. Seek it in having a will in perfect harmony with the will of God. Seek it in studying to be content.

You may say, that is fine talking--but how can we be always content in such a world? I answer, that you need to cast away your pride, and know your deserts, in order to be thankful in any condition. If men really knew that they deserve nothing, and are debtors to God's mercy every day--they would soon cease to complain.

Let me tell you why there is so little contentment in the world. The simple answer is, because there is so little grace, and true godliness. Few know their own sin; few feel their desert; and so few are content with such things as they have. Humility, self-knowledge, a clear sight of our own utter vileness and corruption; these are the true roots of contentment.

Let me tell you--what you should do, if you would be content. You must know your own heart, seek God for your portion, take Christ for your Savior, and use God's Word for your daily food. Contentment must be learned at the feet of Jesus Christ. He who has God for his friend, and heaven for his home--can wait for his good things, and be content with little here below.

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