

Lesson 7 Notes: Why is Contentment Called a 'Compound' of Christian Graces?

First Point: Contentment is described as a 'Compound' of Christian Virtues. Why is that appropriate?

"There is a **compound of grace** in contentment (think of the skill of the apothecary): there is faith, and there is humility, and love, and there is patience, and there is wisdom, and there is hope; almost all graces are compounded. It is an oil which has the ingredients of every kind of grace; and therefore, though you cannot see the particular grace, yet in this oil you have it all. God sees the grace of His Spirit exercised in a special manner, and this pleases God at the heart to see the grace of His Spirit exercised. In one action that you do you may exercise one grace especially, but in contentment you exercise a great many graces at once." (Burroughs, page 121)

Read the Apostle Paul's salutation, verses 1-11, in the first chapter of his letter to the Philippians. How many Christian graces (think of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, "having been filled with the fruit of righteousness..." v. 11) can you find in his opening sentences? How are these characteristics expressive of his attainment of contentment?

Let's look at two of those graces in particular as an example of how they manifest contentment in a believer's life - patience and hope.

Romans 8:24, 25 - "For in **hope** we have been saved, but **hope** that is seen is not **hope** at all; for why does one also **hope** for what he sees? But if we **hope** for what we do not see, with **patience** (perseverance) we wait eagerly for it."

(Burroughs preached a series of sermons about hope published today under the title Hope in which he defines the subject figuratively to mean "to stretch out the neck". It is also called the "helmet of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:8) and as an "anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19).

1 Thessalonians 1:2, 3 - "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and **patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father..." (Faith works; love labors; and **hope is patient**; it is steadfast in perseverance.)

Second Point: So we ask, "How does contentment show that hope is patient?"

Contentment has learned to wait - expectantly, eagerly, patiently, in faith, with joy and peace - for what God has promised will surely come to pass because of His mercy, faithfulness, goodness, and wisdom.

Our propensity to see circumstances only as 'subjective' to our feelings and experience is a great obstacle to learning contentment.

Contrast subjective knowledge with objective knowledge. Is the proposition true of itself (objectively according to the facts as expressed by the Word of God) or true only when I experience or feel it to be true? (See Ephesians 2:4-7 for instance.) Is my salvation truly grounded upon the objective work of Christ or is my salvation true only when I feel it to be so, according to my perceptions or varying emotions? **Things are not as they seem.**

For instance, “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Timothy 6:9).

That is why we must insist that contentment is not defined by how I feel in the midst of circumstances or affliction. Contentment is founded upon the objective truth of what the Bible tells us. (Not to be confused with “Word of Faith” extreme doctrine.)

Personal opinions and private convictions (made public) which are governed by individual feelings gained by experience and expressed through personal testimonies have become the highest form of authority in a nation given over to the subjective truth definition.

“Contentment evidenceth much grace; discontentment much sin. The former is a compound of several graces, the latter a compound of several sins. In a contented frame, there is humility, faith, hope, patience, heavenly-mindedness, crucifixion to the world. In a discontented frame, there is pride, unbelief, impatience, carnality, nay, practical atheism itself! The truth is contentment is better than any comfort that we lack; discontent is worse than any evil that we feel.” (Thomas Jacombe)

Third Point to Process: There is one other essential question we might also ask in this discussion: **How does contentment relate to a person’s desire for happiness?**

Augustine writes: “Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy... There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things...”

“All men seek happiness, but to know where to find this thing desired by all; that is disputed among them, that divides them...”

“The human soul tends toward what it loves, so that attaining it, it may find rest. And the power that draws it is like an interior weight that puts pressure on the will, and this power is called love...”

“It is urgently necessary, therefore, that we know which love, out of the many loves that affect our hearts, will procure for us a truly happy life. In my opinion you will not be happy if you are unable to possess what you love, be that what it may; nor can you be happy if you do not love what you have, be it ever so good; nor even if you are able to have what you love, if it be harmful to you. For if you desire what you cannot have, you are tormented; if you acquire what you do not want, you are deceived; if you do not desire what should be acquired, you are not mentally sound...”

“To be happy, therefore, a man must have what he loves and love what he has, and it must be something that will do him no harm.” (Augustine on Prayer, pages 13-16)

How would you then understand contentment according to a person’s desire for happiness?

Listen to Burroughs again:

“My brethren, the reason why you have not contentment in the things of the world is not because you have not enough of them: this is not the reason, but the reason is because they are not things proportionable to that immortal soul of yours which is capable of God Himself. Many men think when they are troubled, and have not contentment, that it is because they have but a little in the world, and if they had more, then they should be content. That were just thus: suppose a man were hungry, and to satisfy his craving stomach, he should gape and hold open his mouth to take in the wind, and then should think the reason why he is not satisfied is because he has not got enough of the wind: no, the reason is because the thing is not suitable to a craving stomach. Truly there is the same madness in the world; the wind that a man takes in by gaping will as soon satisfy a craving stomach which is ready to famish as all the comforts in the world can satisfy a soul that knows what true happiness means.” (Isa. 55:2)

Notice that in the final sentence here, Burroughs seems to substitute the word happiness for the word contentment as used in the first sentence.

An Addendum relating to a Christian’s ‘graces’.

In older Christian writers, ‘graces’ are much more to be preferred than ‘gifts’. We would understand ‘graces’ to be the characteristics of Christ-likeness produced by the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work in the disciple’s soul. I would suggest that in symbolic language those graces are sometimes pictured as precious jewels adorning the character of the believer. Again, to the Scriptures:

Isaiah 54:11-1 “O afflicted one, storm-tossed, *and* not comforted, Behold, I will set your stones in antimony, and your foundations I will lay in sapphires. Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies and your gates of crystal, and your entire wall of precious stones. All your sons will be taught of the Lord, and the well-being of your sons will be great.”

The Church, the City of God, is pictured as beautified, “made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2, 9, 11, 12).

The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass (Revelation 21:19-21).

“The religion of Christ is the religion of joy. Christ came to take away our sins, to roll off our curse, to unbind our chains, to open our prison house, to cancel our debt; in a word to give us the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Is not this joy? Where can we find a joy so real, so deep, so pure, so lasting? There is every element of joy - deep, ecstatic, satisfying, sanctifying joy - in the gospel of Christ. The believer in Jesus is essentially a happy man. The child of God is, from necessity, a joyful man. His sins are forgiven, his soul is justified, his person is adopted, his trials are blessings, his conflicts are victories, his death is immortality, his future is a heaven of inconceivable, unthought-of, untold, and endless blessedness. With such a God, such a Savior, and such a hope, is he not, ought he not, to be a joyful man?” (Octavius Winslow)