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Teaching Notes

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The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

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Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

1 Timothy 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

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

Initial comments: Christian contentment is not a natural state, but a mystery whose secrets must be learned.

Four-fold Outline:

- I. The Nature of Christian Contentment: What It Is
- II. The Art and Mystery of Christian Contentment
- III. What Lessons Must Be Learned to Achieve Christian Contentment
- IV. The Glories and Excellence of Christian Contentment

Doctrine: To be well-skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment is the duty, glory, and excellence of a Christian.

Definition: Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

I. Christian Contentment Described

- A. It is inward

"If the attainment of true contentment were as easy as keeping quiet outwardly, it would not need much learning."

B. It is quiet

1. What this is not opposed to
 - a due sense of affliction
 - orderly and respectful complaints to God in prayer
 - lawfully seeking help or deliverance from an affliction

2. What it is opposed to
 - murmuring and repining at the hand of God
 - vexing and fretting
 - tumultuousness of spirit
 - unsettled, unstable spirit which distracts from spiritual duties
 - heart-consuming cares
 - sinking discouragements
 - sinful shirkings and shiftings to get relief
 - rising against God in rebellion

C. It is a frame of spirit

“Contentment is a soul-business: an inward, quiet, frame of spirit.”

“Someone is disturbed, suppose it to be a child or man or woman. If you come and bring some great thing to please them, perhaps it will quiet them and they will be contented. It is the thing you bring that quiets them, not the disposition of their own spirits, not any good temper in their own hearts, but the external thing you bring them. But when a Christian is content in the right way, the quiet comes more from the temper and disposition of his own heart than from any external argument or from the possession of anything in the world.”

“Contentment is not merely one act, just a flash in a good mood. You will find many men and women who, if they are in good mood, will be very quiet. But this will not hold. It is not a constant course. It is not the constant tenor of their spirits to be holy and gracious under affliction.”

D. It is a gracious frame

- Not the natural quietness of certain personalities
- Not a sturdy resolution of the will
- Not from the strength of natural reasoning

It is a GRACE from GOD!!

E. It **freely** submits to God’s disposal

- No reluctance, no great persuasion needed to submit gladly to God... not grudging
- Not by constraint... not forced to be content
- Not by stupidity or ignorance of the afflictions facing them

It is a FREE act by rational people based on spiritual judgment of God

F. It **submits** to God's disposal

“What, it says... will you be above God? Is this not God's hand and must your will be regarded more than God's? O under, under! Get you under, O soul! **Keep under! Keep low! Keep under God's feet! You are under God's feet, and keep under His feet! Keep under the authority of God, the majesty of God, the sovereignty of God, the power that God has over you! To keep under is to submit!**”

G. It **takes pleasure** in God's disposal

Not just “I see the justice in what God is doing”

But “I see the **goodness** in what God is doing, and I am delighted with it!”

Note Paul's example: Philippians 4:18 “But I have all, and abound! I am full!” “Alas, poor man! What did Paul have that could make him say he had all? Where was there ever a man more afflicted than Paul was? Many times he had not tatters to hang about his body to cover his nakedness. He had no bread to eat, was often in nakedness, and put in the stocks and whipped and cruelly used. ‘Yet I have all,’ say Paul, for all of that!”

2 Corinthians 6:10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

H. It submits and takes pleasure in **God's disposal**

“A contented heart looks to God's disposal, and submits to God's disposal, that is, he sees the wisdom of God in everything. In his submission, he sees God's sovereignty, but what makes him take pleasure is God's wisdom. The Lord knows how to order things better than I. The Lord sees further than I do.”

I. It does this in every condition

- Whatever the kind of affliction
- Whatever the time and duration of the affliction
- Whatever the varieties of our condition

Definition again: Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

II. The Mystery of Contentment

“But you will object: What you speak of is very good, if we could attain to it; but is it possible for anyone to attain to this? It is possible if you get skill in the art of it; you may attain to it and it will prove to be not such a difficult thing either, if you but understand the mystery of it... There is a great mystery and art in what way a Christian comes to contentment.”

A. A Christian is content, yet unsatisfied

“A man who has learned the art of contentment is the most contented with any low condition that he has in the world, and yet he cannot be satisfied with the enjoyment of all the world. He is contented if he has but a crust, but bread and water... yet if God should give unto him Kingdoms and Empires, all the world to rule... he would not be satisfied with that.”

“Here is the mystery of it: though he heart is so enlarged that the enjoyment of all the world and ten thousand worlds cannot satisfy him for his portion; yet he has a heart quieted under God’s disposal if he gives him but bread and water.”

Difference between a Christian’s **passage** and his **portion**: “A little in the world will content a Christian for his passage, but all the world, and ten thousand times more will not content a Christian for his portion.”

“A soul that is capable of God can be filled with nothing else but God.”

Philippians 3:8-9 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

Psalms 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

B. He comes to contentment by subtraction

“Not so much by adding to what he would have, or to what he has, not by adding more to his condition; but rather by subtracting from his desires, so as to make his desires and his circumstances even and equal.”

“A carnal heart knows no way to be contented but this: I have such and such possessions, and if I had this added to them, and the other comfort added that I have not now, then I should be contented.... The world is infinitely deceived in thinking that contentment lies in having more than we already have.”

“The way to be rich is not by increasing wealth, but by diminishing our desires. Certainly that man or woman is rich, who have their desires satisfied.”

C. By adding another burden to himself

“The world thinks the way to contentment in affliction is to be rid of your burdens (i.e. to have the affliction removed). No...the way to contentment is to add another burden (beyond your present difficult circumstances), that is, to labor to load and burden your heart with your sin; the heavier the burden of your sin is to your heart, the lighter will become your affliction to your heart, and so you shall be content.”

D. By changing the affliction into something else

You make the affliction a positive good rather than a negative evil... a wise stroke from a master craftsman on your soul

Luther: “A Christian becomes a mighty worker and a wonderful creator, to create out of heaviness, joy; out of terror, comfort; out of sin, righteousness; out of death, life.”

“Two men may have the same affliction; to one it shall be as gall and wormwood, yet it shall be wine and honey and delightfulness and joy and advantage and riches to the other.”

E. By doing the work of his circumstances

“A Christian thinks, ‘Well, how shall I come to be satisfied and content?... What is the duty of the circumstances God has put me into?’”

“You should labor to bring your heart to quiet and contentment by setting your souls to work in the duties of your present condition.”

God has done this for a purpose... ask “What duties are required of this condition? How can I make the most of this situation for the glory of God and His Kingdom?”

F. By melting his will into God’s will

“It is not by having his own desires satisfied, but by melting his will and desires into God’s will. So that, in one sense he comes to have his desires satisfied though he does not obtain the thing he desired before; still he comes to be satisfied with this, because he makes his will to be at one with God’s will.”

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Try: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will assign you the desires of your heart.”

Or better: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and His desires will become your desires.”

Or even better: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will become your desire.”

Psalm 47:4 He chooses our inheritance for us, The glory of Jacob whom He loves.

G. By purging out what is within

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

III. The Mystery of Contentment - continued

H. He lives on the dew of God’s blessing

“A Christian can get food that the world does not know of; he is fed in a secret way by the dew of the blessing of God.”

I. He sees God’s love in afflictions

- J. His afflictions are sanctified in Christ
- K. He gets strength from Christ
- L. He makes up his wants in God
- M. He gets contentment for the Covenant

IV. The Mystery of Contentment – concluded

- 1. He supplies wants by what he finds in himself
- 2. He gets supply from the Covenant
 - a. The Covenant in general
 - b. Particular promises in the Covenant
- N. He realizes the things of Heaven
- O. He opens his heart to God

V. How Christ Teaches Contentment

- A. The lesson of self-denial
- B. The vanity of the creature
- C. To know the one thing needful
- D. To know one's relation to the world
- E. Wherein the good of the creature is
- F. The knowledge of one's own heart

VI. How Christ Teaches Contentment – concluded

- G. The burden of a prosperous condition
- H. The evil of being given up to one's heart's desires
- I. The right knowledge of God's providence

VII. The Excellence of Contentment

- A. By it we give God his due worship

- B. In it is much exercise of grace
- C. The soul is fitted to receive mercy
- D. It is fitted to do service
- E. It delivers from temptation
- F. It brings abundant comforts
- G. It gets the comfort of things not possessed
- H. It is a great blessing on the soul
- I. A contented man may expect reward
- J. By it the soul come nearest the excellence of God

VII. The Evils of a Murmuring Spirit

- A. It argues much corruption in the soul
- B. It is the mark of an ungodly man
- C. Murmuring is accounted rebellion
- D. It is contrary to grace, especially in conversation
- E. It is below a Christian

IX. The Evils of a Murmuring Spirit – concluded

- F. By murmuring we undo our prayers
- G. The evil effects of murmuring
- H. Discontent is a foolish sin
- I. It provokes the wrath of God
- J. There is a curse on it
- K. There is much of the spirit of Satan in it
- L. It brings an absolute necessity of disquiet
- M. God may withdraw his protection

X. Aggravations of the Sin of Murmuring

- A. The greater the mercies the greater the sin of murmuring
- B. When we murmur for small things
- C. When men of gifts and abilities murmur
- D. The freeness of God's mercy
- E. When we have the things for the want of which we were discontented
- F. When men are raised from a low position
- G. When men have been great sinners
- H. When men are of little use in the world
- I. When God is about to humble us
- J. When God's hand is apparent in a an affliction
- K. When God has afflicted us for a long time

XI. The Excuses of a Discontented Heart

- A. 'It is a sense of my condition'
- B. 'I am troubled for my sin'
- C. 'God withdraws himself from me'
- D. 'It is men's bad treatment that troubles me'
- E. 'I never expected this affliction'
- F. 'My affliction is so great'
- G. 'My affliction is greater than others'
- H. 'If the affliction were any other, I could be content'
- I. 'My afflictions make me unserviceable to God'
- J. 'My condition is unsettled'
- K. 'I have been in a better condition'

L. 'I am crossed after taking great pains'

M. 'I do not break out in discontent'

XII. How to Attain Contentment

A. Considerations to content the hear in any afflicted condition

1. The greatness of the mercies we have
2. God is beforehand with us with his mercies
3. The abundance of mercies God bestows
4. All creatures are in a vicissitude
5. The creatures suffer for us
6. We have but little time in the world
7. This has been the condition of our betters
8. We were content with the world with grace, and should now be with grace without the world
9. We did not give God the glory when we had our desires
10. The experience of God doing us good in afflictions

XIII. How to Attain Contentment – concluded

B. Directions for attaining contentment

1. There must be grace to make the soul steady
2. Do not grasp too much of the world
3. Have a call to every business
4. Walk by rule
5. Exercise much faith
6. Labour to be spiritually-minded
7. Do not promise yourselves great things

8. Get hearts mortified to the world

C. Directions for attaining contentment – continued

9. Do not pore too much on afflictions

10. Make a good interpretation of God's ways to you

11. Do not regard the fancies of other men

12. Do not be inordinately taken up with the comforts of the world