



The Contented Christian Life

BY REV. EVAN PYLE

Not that I speak in respect of want:
for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,
therewith to be content.
(Philippians 4:11)

Contentedness and thankfulness, to a large degree, are taught in the school of hardship and need. I'm reminded of an old acquaintance who grew up in a large family of, I believe, nine children. They lived in a modest house with only one bathroom. As an adult, I found Dave to be one of the most content and thankful people I have ever known. His modest frame home he shared with his wife and two children was like a mansion to him.

When I think back to the roots of our Thanksgiving holiday celebrated in North America, trials far more severe than cramped quarters were the soil from which this holiday originated. Over half their fledgling settlement perished during that awful winter of 1620-21. Yet, despite the sadness and trouble, these pilgrims gathered with their Indian friends to give sincere thanks to God for their lives and the meager harvest they reaped.

It merits our consideration whether our concept of what is happiness and what constitutes God's blessing and "doing well" may well be colored by false hopes, unrealistic and unscriptural standards, and an unspiritual focus. Does prospering materially occupy a high place on our "blessing chart"? Does battling sickness mean we have fallen out of blessing? Does having troubles mean that we somehow don't measure up? A scriptural perception of what constitutes a happy and contented life is needful or we will always find ourselves discontented and unhappy. Seeing the true heart of God provides the cure to these ills.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

Nothing can ever separate us from His love. That means in the darkest of circumstances I am still connected to and covered by his Love. Even our sins and personal failings cannot separate us from His love.

Yes, I understand the danger of being satisfied with less than God's will. As Joshua said, "*Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!*" (Joshua 7:7). I never want to get to the place where my sinful state is "good enough" in my own mind. Yet I cannot, nor will I ever be able to perfect myself before the Lord. I become the proverbial dog chasing his tail, a race nobody will ever win. This knowledge should drive me to the Cross, where I am cleansed by His perfect blood. This is where I yield my sinful self to Jesus' righteousness so that He can live and love through me. There I am content to dwell safely. There is where I know I have acceptance with God.

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.
(Ephesians 1:6)

When I know I am accepted in the Beloved (Christ), I no longer trudge the impossible path of making myself accepted before Him. I rest in His love and from Jesus' strength I move forward in His will, not in my own strength or power, but in His.

Paul often found himself in dire circumstances. He was hounded by evil people who opposed him at every turn and actively sought his death. Paul even listed some of his trials and tribulations in Corinthians.

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; (2 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Yet through all this Paul had learned the secret of living a content and thankful life.

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. (Philippians 4:11)

Paul's secret to a content and happy life is revealed in the next chapter of 2 Corinthians. Here Paul is discussing his problems with the Lord and even besought Him three times that these trials may be taken away. God's answer is the secret Paul learned and that we must learn:

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

In troubled times, times of fear and uncertainty, times of trials and tribulations, our Father cries out to us, "My Grace is sufficient for thee!" When we are weak and run to God and seek His grace, He becomes our secret to a contented Christian life. It is then we become strong...in Him. We know He is always enough and sufficient for our need. In our time of need, we who are heavy laden come to Jesus and He gives us rest. Praise be to the Lord!

The greater the hardship, the more precious the blessings of true riches become.

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (1 Timothy 6:6)

True, we can carry none of goods with us to the other side. But we can glory in our afflictions when we know they go toward gaining the crown of life.

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:8)

True thanksgiving, happiness and contentment bring the material and natural under control of the spiritual and immutable. It is my prayer that we, brothers and sisters, will continue to seek God and his daily grace until Christ truly becomes for us our “all in all.”

...but Christ is all, and in all. (Colossians 3:11b)