

CONTENTMENT SERIES

SESSION 2—The Lies of Discontentment

1. “I need more than what I have to be content.”

Gen. 3:4-5

You think, “If I had such a thing, then I would be content. I say there is more good in contentment, than there is in the thing that you would gladly have to cure your discontent. And I will open that in several particulars, such as these: (1.) I would gladly have such a thing, and then I could be content. But if I had it, then it would be the creature that helped me to my contentment. Whereas now it is the grace of God in my soul that makes me content. And surely it is better to be content with the grace of God in my soul, than with the enjoyment of an outward comfort. (2.) If I had such a thing, indeed my estate might be better, but my soul would not be better. By contentment my soul is made better, when it would not be bettered by an estate, or lands, or friends. And contentment makes my self to be better. And therefore, contentment is a better portion than the thing I am inclined to have as my portion. (3.) If I get contentment by having my desire satisfied, that’s just self-love; but when I am contented with the hand of God, and I am willing to be at His disposal, that comes from my love to God. In having my desire satisfied, I am contented through self-love; but through the grace of contentment I come to be contented out of love to God. And isn’t it better to be contented out of love to God, than from a principle of self-love? (4.) If I am contented because I have what I desire, then perhaps I am contented in that one particular. But that one particular doesn’t furnish me with contentment in another thing. Perhaps I grow more fussy, picky, and defiant in other things. If you give children what they want in some things, they grow that much more coy, and fussy, and discontented if they cannot have other things they want. But once I’ve overcome my heart, and I’m contented through the grace of God in my heart, that doesn’t content me only in this particular, but in general, in whatever befalls me. Say I’m discontented, and I want something, and afterwards I have it. Now, does this prepare me to be contented in other things? No. But when I have this grace of contentment, I’m prepared to be contented in all conditions. And thus you see that contentment brings comfort to a man’s life — fills it full of comfort in this world. Yes, the truth is, it’s even Heaven on earth. For what is Heaven, if not the rest and quiet of a man’s spirit? What is the special thing that is in Heaven, if not rest and joy? That’s what makes the life of Heaven. There’s rest

CONTENTMENT SERIES

and joy, and satisfaction in God. So it is here, in a contented spirit. There's rest and joy, and satisfaction in God. In Heaven there's singing praises to God; and a contented heart is always praising and blessing God. You have Heaven while you're on earth, when you have a contented spirit. Indeed, in some regards, it's better than Heaven. How is that, you ask? There is some kind of honor that God has in it, and some excellency in it, that He doesn't have in Heaven. (Burroughs, 148)

A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction...it is not so much by adding to what he would have, or to what he does have; it is not by adding more to his condition; but rather, it is by subtracting from his desires, so as to make his desires and his condition even and equal...A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by getting rid of his burden, as by adding another burden to himself...The way of contentment is to add another burden — that is, to labor to load and burden your heart with your sin. And the heavier the burden of your sin is to your heart, the lighter will be the burden of your affliction to your soul; and so you will come to be content. If your burden were lightened, that would content you; and you think there's no way to lighten it, except to get it off. But you are deceived; for if you can get your heart to be more burdened with your sin, you will be less burdened with your afflictions. (Burroughs, 49)

Perhaps if he had more he would be less content. Covetousness is cancer which is never satisfied. The world is such that the more we have—the more we crave. The world cannot fill the heart of man. When the fire burns, how do you quench it? not by putting oil in the flame, or laying on more wood—but by withdrawing the fuel. When the appetite is inflamed after riches, how may a man be satisfied? not by having just what he desires—but by withdrawing the fuel, and by moderating and lessening his desires. He who is contented has enough! A man in a fever thirsts; how do you satisfy him? not by giving him liquid things, which will inflame his thirst the more; but by removing the cause, and so curing the distemper. The way for a man to be contented, is not by raising his estate higher—but by bringing his heart lower! (Watson, 85)

Php. 4:11-13; Prov. 30:8-9

CONTENTMENT SERIES

2. “I can achieve contentment as long as I do not pursue sinful things.”

Is 1:10-15; Matt. 6:31-33; 1 Tim. 6:6-10

Discontent takes the heart wholly off from God, and fixes it upon the present trouble, so that a man's mind is not upon his prayer—but upon his trouble. Discontent disjoins the soul; and it is impossible now that a Christian should go so steadily and cheerfully in God's service. O how lame is his devotion!... Discontent is a leaven which sours every comfort; it puts vinegar into every mercy, it doubles every cross. But the contented spirit sucks sweetness from every flower of providence; it can make poison into a choice morsel. Contentment is full of consolation. (Watson, 58, 66)

3. “God typically treats other people much better than he does me.”

James 3:14-16

He who envies what his neighbor has—is never contented with that portion which God's providence, parcels out to him. As envy stirs up strife, so it creates discontent: the envious man looks so much upon the blessings which another enjoys—that he cannot see his own mercies—and so does continually vex and torture himself. Cain envied that his brother's sacrifice was accepted, and his rejected; hereupon he was discontented, and murderous thoughts began to arise in his heart. (Watson, 78)

Every man is complaining that his estate is no better, though he seldom complains that his heart is no better. (Watson, 26)

I implore you to consider that God doesn't deal by you as you deal with him. If God were to make the worst interpretation of all your ways towards Him, as you do of His towards you, it would go very badly with you. (Burroughs, 257.)

4. “This area of discontentment is an isolated issue in my life, so I can work on growing in other areas and just hope this doesn't affect me too much.”

CONTENTMENT SERIES

The discontented person thinks everything he does for God is too much, and everything God does for him is too little. (Watson, 81)

Discontentment is the devil's delight! Now it is as he would have it, he loves to warm himself at the fire of our passions. Repentance is the joy of the angels—and discontent is the joy of the devils! As the devil dances at discord, so he sings at discontent. The fire of our passions makes the devil a bonfire! It is a kind of heaven to him—to see us torturing ourselves with our own troubles; but by holy contentment, we frustrate him of his purpose, and do, as it were, put him out of countenance. (Watson, 69)

Matt. 15:7-9, 22:37; James 4:3

5. “You don’t understand my circumstances. This affliction is too great to be content.”

1 Cor. 10:13

You may say, you don’t know what our afflictions are; our afflictions are such that you can’t conceive of them, because you don’t feel them. Answer—Though I cannot know what your afflictions are, yet I know what your mercies are. And I know that those are so great that I am sure there can be no afflictions in this world that are as great as the mercies you have...Set any affliction beside this mercy and see which weighs heaviest; this mercy is certainly greater than any affliction. That you have the Day of Grace and Salvation; that you are not now in hell — this is a greater mercy. That you have the sound of the Gospel still in your ears; that you have the use of your reason — this is a greater mercy than your afflictions. (Burroughs, 198)

6. “I’m only grumbling or worrying about my circumstances. It’s not directed towards God.”

Murmuring is quarreling with God, and inveighing against him; “they spoke against God.” (Nu. 21:5) The murmurer essentially says, that God has dealt wrongly with him, and he has deserved better from him. The murmurer charges God with folly and unkindness. (Watson, 62)

Ex. 16:1-8