

November, 2022

“Christian Double Satisfaction”

As Thanksgiving approaches, we Christians, above all others, ought to be marked by a spirit of joy and thankfulness for the innumerable blessings we have received from the hand of our God and Father. In fact, the key to cultivating genuine gratitude in the Christian life is to appreciate this filial relationship that we enjoy with God as Father. Matthew Henry’s *The Pleasantness of a Religious Life* is a collection of six sermons he preached in 1740 on why a person ought to aspire to a religious life. By religious he does not mean a cold, sterile, stoic existence. Far from it. Instead, Henry unearths the hidden blessings of the religious life and demonstrates how Christians are able, whether with much or little, to achieve greater degrees of satisfaction in this life than any unbeliever.

In one place, Henry reminds the reader that creature comforts are not ends in themselves, but means to the end of enjoying God. He writes,

To be religious is to enjoy God in all our creature comforts. And is not that pleasant? It is to take the common supports and conveniences of life, be they of the richest or the meanest kind, as the products of his providential care concerning us, and the gifts of his bounty to us; and in them to “taste and see that the Lord is good,” good to all and good to us. It is to look above second causes to the first cause, through the creature to the Creator, and to say concerning everything which is agreeable and serviceable to us, “This I asked, and this I have from the hand of my heavenly Father.”¹

God is to be the one that we enjoy in all our creature comforts, he is the highest source of enjoyment in all things. All too often our minds are drawn to second causes to the exclusion of the first because we have forgotten that even the “common supports and conveniences of life” are given to us by God. No doubt this spiritual amnesia is due in part to the technological age in which we live, where things previously obtained only after tireless effort are now available with the click of a button and delivered to our doorsteps within forty-eight hours. In a world where everything comes easy it is easy to forget that God is still the one who gives us our daily bread.

One way to break free from this purely horizontal mindset is to consider that the satisfaction we so crave is not inherent in creature comforts, but that satisfaction itself is from above. God is not only the giver of every good gift, but even the ability to *truly* enjoy his good gifts is a gift to all those who know and love him. Consider Solomon’s wise counsel, “Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions *and power to enjoy them*, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil – this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:19). In this the Christian is further indebted to God, both for the gift and for the ability to know and enjoy the gift for what it is – a token of God’s paternal affection. And this gratitude extends even to the “common supports and conveniences of life, be they of the riches or meanest kind,” those things we are so prone to

¹ Matthew Henry, *The Pleasantness of the Religious Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2021), 50, 51.

overlook and even despise at times, because *all* things are received from God's hand. Simple pleasures can inspire tremendous amounts of joy, but only when we remember from where they come. As Henry with his typical soul-stirring eloquence puts it, Christians enjoy a double satisfaction in their receiving God's blessings *and* in knowing from whom those blessings flow.

What a noble taste and relish does this put into all the blessings with which we are daily loaded, our health and ease, our rest and sleep, our food and raiment, all the satisfaction we have in our relations, peace in our dwellings, success in our callings! The sweetness of these is more than doubled, it is highly raised, when by our religion we are enabled to see them all coming to us from the goodness of God, our great benefactor, and thus enjoy them richly; while those who look no further than the creature, enjoy them very poorly, and only as the inferior creatures do.²

It is indeed a sad reality that not all experience this double satisfaction. Despite his unbridled pursuit of earthly pleasure and immoderate use of its goods, the unbeliever's joy will never match that of the believer. Henry goes so far as to say his enjoyment is only on par with that of "inferior creatures" who have no filial relationship with God. Even if he outpaces the Christian quantitatively in amassing material possessions, the Christian's delight will always be qualitatively better because he enjoys not half, but the whole of all of God's blessings to him.

Carnal, irreligious people, though they take greater liberty in the use of the delights of sense than good people dare take, and therein think they have the advantage of them, yet they have not half the true delight in them that good people have; not only because all excesses are a force upon nature, and surfeits are as painful as hunger and thirst, but because they deprive themselves of the comfort of receiving them from their Father's hand, and are not affected to him by obedient children. They make use of the creature, but "they have not looked unto the Maker thereof, nor had respect to him that fashioned it long ago," as good people do; and so they come short of the pleasure which good people have.³

This call to enjoy God's simple pleasures reminds me of my paternal grandfather who passed away nearly three years ago. As a boy I remember rummaging through his already disheveled home office, pulling knickknacks off the shelf and flipping through old, yellowed family photographs. One of the items featured prominently on his shelf was a tiny stump, roughly the diameter of a CD. Legend has it that when my older brother was very young, he ran out to the wood pile beside my grandfather's house, green crayon in hand, scrawled "To Pa. From, Johnny," as legibly as he could, and presented the stump to him as a gift. My grandfather kept that stump in his office for decades and it was not because the stump had tremendous value in and of itself, but because he loved the one who had given it to him. In the same way, Christian, even the common supports and conveniences of your life that you are prone to overlook have been given to you by your Father who loves you. There is nothing so small in your life for which you cannot return thanks and praise because all things, both great and small, have been given to you by him. God has been good to you. He has given you his only Son and he has given and will give you all things. You have much for which to be genuinely thankful.

Blessings, Pastor Stephen

² Ibid., 51.

³ Ibid., 51-52.