

Contentment vs. Coveteousness

From John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 343-344.

Hebrews 13:5

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (NKJ)

5. *Let your conversation be without covetousness, etc.* While he seeks to correct covetousness, he rightly and wisely bids us at the same time to be content with our present things; for it is the true contempt of money, or at least a true greatness of mind in the right and moderate use of it, when we are content with what the Lord has given us, whether it be much or little; for certainly it rarely happens that anything satisfies an avaricious man; but on the contrary they who are not content with a moderate portion, always seek more even when they enjoy the greatest affluence. It was a doctrine which Paul had declared, that he had learned, so as to know how to abound and how to suffer need. Then he who has set limits to his desire so as to acquiesce resignedly in his lot, has expelled from his heart the love of money.

For he has said, etc. Here he quotes two testimonies; the first is taken, as some think, from the first chapter of Joshua, but I am rather of the opinion that it is a sentence drawn from the common doctrine of Scripture, as though he had said, "The Lord everywhere promises that He will never be wanting [lacking] to us." He infers from this promise what is found in Psalm 118, that we have the power to overcome fear when we feel assured of God's help.

Here indeed he plucks up the evil by the very roots, as it is necessary when we seek to free from it the minds of men. It is certain that the source of covetousness is mistrust; for whosoever has this fixed in his heart, that he will never be forsaken by the Lord, will not be immoderately solicitous about present things, because he will depend on God's providence. When therefore the Apostle is seeking to cure us of the disease of covetousness, he wisely calls our attention to God's promises, in which He testifies that He will ever be present with us. He hence infers afterwards that as long as we have such a helper there is no cause to fear. For in this way it can be that no depraved desires will importune [plague] us; for faith alone is that which can quiet the minds of men, whose disquietude without it is too well known.