

The Rare
JEWEL
of
Christian
CONTENTMENT

by **JEREMIAH BURROUGHS**

In Which is Shown

1. What CONTENTMENT is
2. The Holy Art or Mystery of it.
3. Several Lessons that Christ teaches to work the Heart to Contentment.
4. The Excellencies of it.
5. The Evils of Murmuring.
6. The Aggravations of the sin of Murmuring.

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*Hand-typed, formatted, modernized, and annotated
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Editor's Preface

It's always helpful to put books or sermons in their historical context, just as we do with the text of Scripture when we preach it. These sermons were given at a particular time in history, and at a particular time in the life of the preacher, Jeremiah Burroughs. So I've annotated some of those events, and explained who those persons were, and even what some of those words meant at the time – what images they conveyed to his English listeners, like “Privy Chamber.”

One of the things you'll notice in these sermons, is that they're not doctrinal treatises written for the Academy. They were written simply; they needed very little modernizing. These are homilies – practical applications of the truth of Scripture – written to the people of God, who needed encouragement at the time. And so he repeats himself to drive home his points. I think it helps if you imagine yourself sitting in a pew. See Burroughs in the pulpit, speaking off-the-cuff from his scant notes, nodding at folks, turning from side to side, repeating to one group, what he just said to the other – pounding the pulpit to drive home a point.

Along the way, he goes down a rabbit trail or two. He organizes his thoughts on the fly, rewording an important truth – putting it two or three different ways so you don't miss it. Meanwhile, in the front row, a stenographer is frantically taking notes, hoping to preserve what he's saying, and even how he's saying it, so that later generations might enjoy it too. That would explain the many incomplete sentences, missing words and odd punctuation, all those parenthetical thoughts, and mixtures of I, we, and you in the same sentence. They make sense if you hear him change his voice, maybe turning aside to speak to no one in particular, as if taking on a character, playing a role on stage. He lets the congregation “overhear” his thoughts as he weighs the import of it all. He puts himself in *their* shoes, thinking *their* thoughts, using *their* words...

To help with that, I've completed sentences, provided missing words, finished thoughts, and even used contractions to make it more conversational (it's OK, there were many contractions in the original). I added sermon titles, and the dates for each sermon from the margins of the 1670 edition. Three were dated Sept. 21st (an obvious error). I changed the first one to the 14th, and the third to the 28th. I avoided paraphrasing (as far as possible), so you hear his ideas the way he conveyed them. I added and corrected a number of scripture references, footnoting the full text when appropriate. Otherwise, this is the 1651 wording. That's important, because a lot changed in the twenty years from 1651-1670. This sermon series was given in the heat of battle, literally.

As Burroughs opens the next sermon in the series, he gives a brief summary of where he left off the “last day” – some may not have attended the previous one. And because it's a series, each week may not be self-contained; they overlap. He begins a new topic part way through one sermon, and continues it the next. That happened in Sermon 4 with the *Lessons*, and Sermon 9 with the *Pleas*. In some editions of this work, the sermons are grouped topically. As a result, you may find only eight “chapters” listed for the eleven sermons that were actually given. I chose to keep the organization of the original 1651 publication, the sermons as presented in 1645.

Who was Jeremiah Burroughs, anyway? He was born in 1599, and studied at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. He graduated in 1624, but left university because he had become a non-conformist. That means he was opposed to changes in the Book of Common Prayer favoring Roman Catholic doctrine and practice, over the principles of the Reformation that Cranmer established a hundred years earlier. Burroughs refused to *conform* to them. He wanted *pure* doctrine and practices, drawn from Scripture alone; hence the term “Puritan,” which had been used since the 1550s.

Burroughs was assistant to Edmund Calamy at Bury St. Edmunds. In 1631 he became rector of Tivetshall, Norfolk. He was suspended for non-conformity in 1636, and afterward deprived of his office. He went to Rotterdam in 1637, to be a teacher of the English church there. He returned to England in 1641 and served as a preacher at Stepney and Cripplegate, London. But those were

turbulent times. Burroughs was a contemporary of Oliver Cromwell, who led the Parliamentarians against the Royalists in the first English Civil War of 1642-1646.

Burroughs was a member of the Westminster Assembly, and one of the few who opposed the Presbyterian majority. He was one of the Five Dissenting Brethren who put their names to the Independent manifesto, *An Apologetical Narration*, in early 1644. He was one of the most distinguished of the English Independents, and one of the most moderate, acting in accordance with the motto on his study door (in Latin and Greek): "Opinionum varietas et opinantium unitas non sunt ασυστατα (*asustata*)" – "Difference of belief and unity of believers are not inconsistent."

He gave these sermons in late summer, 1645. Burroughs was then serving in the Westminster Assembly, helping to prepare the *Westminster Confession of Faith* which would be published the following year, 1646. That's the context of these sermons. And that's the context of the final sermon in this book, "The Saints Duty in Times of Extremity." On November 13, 1646, Burroughs died of complications resulting from a fall from his horse two weeks earlier, on his way back from the Westminster Assembly. Samuel Bolton took his place in the Assembly.

As a postscript to this history, in 1660 the monarchy of England was restored under Charles II. Two years later, the Act of Uniformity was passed. It led to the Great Ejection, when 2000 Puritan preachers were forced from their pulpits and their positions, for failing to accept the revised Book of Common Prayer with its Catholic practices. They were forbidden to preach, teach, or even pray in public with others. Many went to prison; others fled to the Continent; still others to America. They had been living in fear, in the middle of a bloody Civil War, faced with danger at every turn. They needed to find the peace, security, and contentment that God alone can provide. There is no safe harbor on earth. That's a truth which every generation of God's people should take to heart, including our own. And that's Burroughs message to us in this series.

May this buoy your spirits, freshen your mind, and renew your confidence in our Mighty God. He goes before us, and He goes behind, as we daily go about the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

William Gross

April 2020

www.onthewing.org

P.S. Burroughs uses the word "estate" throughout this sermon series. What does he mean? Some say your estate is your net worth – your wealth; others say it's your land, or your personal property – like your favorite fishing rod. But that's not quite what Burroughs has in mind. It's what you accumulate during your lifetime, whether debt, or surplus. It's where you live, in your heart. Your estate is your *heritage*, and it will be your *legacy*. Adam left us an *earthly* estate of sin and death, a material estate. But the estate we inherit in Christ is righteousness and life, a *heavenly* estate. Contentment is choosing the right estate in which to live, by God's grace.

To the Reader.

The worthy Man, especially in his later years, was surrounded (through God's blessing on him) with a very great confluence of what might give contentment to a vast spirit of his Rank and Calling. He was enriched with a large measure of abilities and opportunities in serving his Lord. To glorify Him, and do much good to others, is the divine part of a gracious Man (which he was). These had the highest and most solid satisfaction, and in many respects exceeded what personal communion with God, singly considered, brings in. Besides this, he lived and died in a fulness of honor and esteem with the best of men, of saints — yes, and the worst of enemies.

Likewise, his estate and outward comforts were within his sphere and rank; all of which did and might afford contentment as to what was outward in him. In the midst of these, his study was to find out a more sublime way, and hidden art of self-sufficiency, than was in the power of all things to contribute or teach — such a skill as not only poised and composed his spirit in the present enjoyment of all, but might fortify and furnish him with provision for the future against the loss of all, in times in which no man knows what evil will be in the earth. His first lines show this was the mark he shot at. This art, some philosophers of old pretended themselves to be masters of, and to instruct others in, through the assistance of natural and moral elements elevated to the utmost height that their principles could carry them; but in vain. Their chemistry in this kind, was able to produce no more than a sullen obstinacy and obdurateness of mind.

The natural spirit of a man, feeling itself greater than all creatures, gathering up and consolidating itself into itself, is able (as Solomon says) to sustain its own, and all other infirmities (Ecc 8.8). But that autarchy this author presents here, is a mystery which none of these Princes of the World knew, nor the Wisdom of Man teaches — only the Holy Ghost teaches what few, except those who are perfect, attain. He teaches the soul to deny itself into weakness, emptiness, in and to itself, and to all other things. And thus dissolved, the soul unites itself to Him who alone has blessedness and all-sufficiency. Associated and made intimate with Him, it melts itself into all His interests, making them its own. And thereby it comes to have the All-Sufficiency of the High God, as its self-sufficiency. And then, what state can that soul be in, in which it may not be content? — seeing that it has God as its chief comfort in its best times, and its only comfort in its worst.

This, though it is the inheritance of every saint in the right and title to it, yet the possession and enjoyment of it depends upon an improvement of this inheritance; and that depends upon a skill which is to be learned by experience and much exercise. As Paul says, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content with it" (Phi 4.11). This piece of learning, this serious, spirited man inured himself to; and digging for it as for rubies (as Solomon's Scholar dug for wisdom, Pro 2.4), he has found it, and has hewn out this JEWEL¹ out of the Rock, and has artfully cut it, so that the innate rays of so glorious a grace, might shine forth to others.

And here it comes to be presented, though set out as the richest Jewels are, often in ruder metals for a while, until they are bargained for; but then they are placed in Tablets worthy of them. The only seat this is ordained for, is the precious Tablet of men's hearts, in and from which alone the native luster of it will be made conspicuous. Reader, buy it; set and wear it there, and it shall (as Solomon says in Pro 3.22-26) *be life to your soul, and grace to your neck. You will not be afraid when you lie down; indeed, your sleep will be sweet to you, for the Lord will be your confidence.*

*Thomas Goodwin; Sydrach Simpson; William Greenhill; Philip Nye;
William Bridge; John Yates; William Adderly.*

¹ A title given neither by himself, nor by us, the Publishers, to the subject itself; yet the materials themselves deserve it

Sermon 1: Contentment: What It Is.

at Stepney, Thursday, July 27, 1645.

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

This verse is a very seasonable cordial to revive the drooping spirits of the saints in these sad and sinking times. For the *hour of temptation* has already come upon all the world, to try the inhabitants of the earth; and especially, this is the day of *Jacob's* troubles in our own bowels.

Our great Apostle experientially holds forth in this Gospel-text as the very life and soul of all practical divinity. In it we may plainly read his own proficiency in Christ's School, and what lesson every Christian who would evidence the power and growth of godliness in his own soul, must necessarily learn from him.

These words are brought in by Paul, as a plain argument to persuade the Philippians that he didn't seek great things in the world, and that he didn't seek *theirs*, but *them*. He didn't long for a great estate; he had better things to take up his heart with. I don't speak (he says) in respect to want; for whether I have or don't have, my heart is fully satisfied, I have enough; *I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content with it.*

I have learned that contentment in every condition is a great art, a spiritual mystery. It is to be learned, and it is to be so learned as a mystery. And therefore in verse 12 he affirms, *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound, everywhere and in all things I am instructed.* The word *memuemai*, which is translated *instructed*, is derived from that word *musterion* which signifies *mystery*. It's as if he said, "I have learned the mystery of this business. Contentment is to be learned as a great mystery. And those who are thoroughly trained in that art, have learned a deep mystery, which is a Samson's riddle to a natural man." *I have learned it.* It is not to learn now; nor did I have it at the start. I have *attained* it, though with much ado. And now by the grace of God, I have become Master of this Art.

In whatever state I am — The word *state* is not in the original, but *in what I am* — that is, in whatever concerns or befalls me, whether I have little or nothing at all.

To be content with it — The word which we render *content* here, has great elegance and significance in the original. Strictly speaking, it is only attributed to God, who has styled himself *God All-Sufficient*, as resting wholly satisfied in and with Himself alone. But he is pleased to freely communicate from His fullness to the creature, so that from God in Christ, the saints *receive grace for grace* (Joh 1.16) — in as much as there is a correspondence in them of the same grace that is in Christ, in their proportion,. And in this sense Paul says, I have a *self-sufficiency*, as the word denotes.

But if Paul has a self-sufficiency, you may ask, how are we sufficient of ourselves? Our Apostle affirms in another case, *that we are not sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves* (2Cor 3.5). His meaning must therefore be, I find a sufficiency of satisfaction in my own heart, through the grace of Christ that is in me. Though I don't have outward comforts and worldly accommodations to supply my necessities, yet I enjoy portion enough between Christ and my own soul, to abundantly satisfy me in every condition. And this interpretation is agreeable to Pro 14.14, *A good man is satisfied from himself.* And it's agreeable with what Paul verifies about himself in another place, that *though he had nothing, yet he possessed all things* (2Cor 6.10), because he had a right to the Covenant and Promise, which contains virtually all; and an interest in Christ, the Fountain and good of all. And having that, it is no marvel that he says that in whatever state he was in, he was content. Thus you have the genuine interpretation of the text. I won't make any distinction in the words, because I understand them only to advocate that *one most necessary*

Sermon 1: Contentment: What It Is.

duty, namely, quieting and comforting the hearts of God's people under the troubles and changes they meet with in these heart-shaking times. And the doctrinal conclusion in brief is this:

DOCTRINE: *That to be well-skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment, is the duty, glory, and excellency of a Christian.*

This evangelical truth is held forth sufficiently in the Scripture. Yet take one or two more parallel passages to confirm it.

In 1Tim 6.6 and 8 you have both the duty expressed, and the glory of it: *Having food and raiment*, he says in verse 8, *let us be content with it*. There is the duty. *But godliness with contentment is great gain*, verse 6. There is the glory and excellency of it — as if godliness were not gain unless there is contentment with it. You have the same exhortation in Heb 13.5: *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have*. I don't find any Apostle or writer of Scripture, who addresses so much of this spiritual mystery of contentment, as our Apostle has done throughout his Epistles.

To clearly open and prove this practical conclusion, I will endeavor to demonstrate these four things:

First, the nature of this Christian contentment — what it is.

Secondly, the Art and Mystery of it.

Thirdly, what those lessons are that must be learned to work the heart to contentment.

Fourthly, what the glorious excellency of this grace chiefly consists in.

Concerning the first, take this description: *Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, freely submitting to and taking satisfaction in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.*

I'll break open this description; for it is a box of precious ointment, very comforting and useful for troubled hearts, in troubled times and conditions.

First, *I say contentment is a sweet, inward HEART-THING. It is a work of the spirit within.* It is not only *not* seeking help for ourselves by outward coercion, nor by a forbearance of discontented murmuring expressions — as in froward¹ words and carryings-on against God or others — but it is the inward submission of the heart. Psa 62.1, *Truly, my soul waits upon God*, and verse 5, *My soul, wait only upon God* — so it is in your Bibles. But the words may be translated just as rightly: *My soul, be silent to God. Hold your peace, O my soul.* Not only must the tongue hold its peace, but the soul must be silent. Many may sit down silently, forbearing discontented expressions, and yet they are inwardly swollen with discontentment.

This manifests a perplexed distemper,² and great frowardness in their hearts. Notwithstanding their outward silence, God hears the peevish, fretful language of their souls. The shoe may be smooth and neat without, while the flesh is pinched within. There may be great calmness and stillness outwardly, yet tremendous confusion, bitterness, disturbance, and vexation within.

Some are so weak that they are not able to constrain the disquietude of their own spirits, but in words and behavior, they reveal what woeful disturbances there are within. Their spirits are like the raging sea, tossing out nothing but mire and dirt — being not only troublesome to themselves, but to all those they live with. There are others who are able to restrain such distempers of heart (as Judas did when he betrayed Christ with a kiss). But still, they boil inwardly, and it eats away like a canker. So David speaks concerning some whose words are smoother than honey and butter, and yet they have war in their hearts (Psa 55.21). And as he says in another place, *While I kept*

¹ *Froward*: habitually disposed to disobedience and opposition; headstrong; willful; obstinate.

² *Distemper*: here it means an angry and disagreeable mood, literally *against temperate or moderate behavior*. But it can also mean disease, infection, compulsion, agitation, disorder, perversion, or even a cancer of the soul.

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silence, my bones grew old (Psa 32.3). So it is with these. While there is a serene calm on their tongues, they still have blustering storms in their spirits. And while they keep silence, their hearts are troubled, even worn away with anguish and vexation. They have peace and quiet outwardly, but war within, from the unruly and turbulent workings of their hearts.

If the attainment of true contentment were as easy as keeping quiet outwardly, there's no need for great learning of it. It might be had with less skill and strength than an Apostle had — indeed, less than an ordinary Christian has, or may have. Therefore, certainly there is great deal more in it than can be attained by common gifts, and the ordinary power of reason, which often reins in our nature. It is a *heart-business*.

Secondly, it is the *QUIET* of the heart. All is sedate and still there. To understand this better, this quiet, gracious frame of spirit is not opposed to the following.

1. It is not opposed to *a due sense of affliction*. God gives his people leave to be sensible of what they suffer. Christ doesn't say, Don't count that as a cross, which is a cross; but take up your cross daily. As it is in the natural body, if the body takes in medicine and isn't able to bear it, but quickly vomits it up, or if it isn't felt at all (it doesn't stir the body) —either of these ways, the medicine does no good. Rather, it argues that the body is greatly distempered, and will hardly be cured. So it is with the spirits of men under afflictions. If either they cannot bear God's potions (but throw them up again); or they are not sensible of them (their souls are no more stirred by them than the body is by a small draught of beer), then it is a sad symptom that their souls are in a dangerous and almost incurable condition. So that, this inward quietness is not in opposition to the sense of affliction. For indeed, there would be no true contentment if you were not apprehensive and sensible of your afflictions when God is angry.

2. It isn't opposed to *moaning and complaining to God, and to our friends, in an orderly way*. Though a Christian ought to be quiet under God's correcting hand, yet he may complain to God without any breach of Christian contentment. As one of the ancients says, "though it is not to be with a tumultuous clamor, and shrieking out in a perplexed passion;"¹ yet in a quiet, still, submissive way, he may unburden his heart to God. Likewise, he may communicate his sad condition to his gracious friends, showing them how God has dealt with him, and how heavy the affliction is upon him, so that they may speak a word in due season to his weary soul.

3. It is not opposed to *any lawful seeking for help into another condition, or simply endeavoring to be delivered from the present afflictions by the use of lawful means*. No, I may lay in provision for my deliverance, and use God's means, waiting on Him because I don't know that it isn't His will to alter my condition. And so far as He leads me, I may follow His providence; that is but my duty. God is thus far mercifully indulgent to our weakness, and won't take it badly from us, if by earnest and importunate prayer we seek Him out for deliverance, till we know His good pleasure in it. And certainly, seeking help in this way, with such submission and holy resignation of spirit — to be delivered *when* God wills, and *as* God wills, and *how* God wills, so that *our* wills are melted into the will of *God* — this is not opposed to the quietness which God requires in a contented spirit.

Question. But then it may be asked, *What is this quietness of spirit opposed to?*

Answer.

1. It is opposed to *murmuring and repining at the hand of God, as the discontented Israelites often did*. If we cannot endure this in our children or servants, much less can God bear it in us.

¹ Perhaps From Constantine's Letter to the Antiochians (in Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, Book III. chap.60).

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2. It is *opposed to vexing and fretting*, which is a degree beyond murmuring. I remember the saying of a heathen, “A wise man may grieve *under*, but not be vexed *with* his afflictions.” There is a vast difference between a kindly grieving, and a distempered vexation.

3. It is *opposed to tumultuousness of spirit*. This is when the thoughts run distractingly, and work in a confused manner, so that the affections are like the unruly multitude in Acts — they didn’t know why they had come together (Act 19.32). The Lord expects you to be silent under his rod. As was said in Act 19.36, *You ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly*.

4. It is *opposed to an unsettled and unfixed spirit, by which the heart is distracted from the present duty that God requires in our several relations, both towards God, ourselves, and others*. We should prize duty more highly than to be distracted by every trivial occasion. A Christian greatly values every service of God, even though in the eyes of the world and of natural reason, some may seem a slight and empty business, beggarly rudiments, or foolishness. But seeing that God calls for it, the authority of the command so overawes his heart, that he is willing to spend himself, and to be spent in discharging it. It is an expression of Luther’s, that ordinary works that are done *in* faith, and *from* faith, are more precious than heaven and earth. And if this is so, and a Christian knows it, a little matter shouldn’t divert him. Rather, he should answer every diversion and resist every temptation, as Nehemiah answered Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah (when they would have hindered the building of the wall): *I am doing a great work (he says) so that, I cannot come down; why should the work of the Lord cease?* (Neh 6.3).

5. It is *opposed to distracting, heart-eating cares and fears*. A gracious heart so estimates its union with Christ, and the work that God sets it about, that it will not willingly allow anything to come in to choke or deaden it. A Christian desires that the Word of God take such full possession of him, as to divide between soul and spirit (Heb 4.12); but he will not allow the fear and noise of evil tidings to make such an impression in his soul, as to make a division and struggle there, like the twins in Rebekah’s womb. A great man will permit common people to stand outside his doors, but he won’t let them come in and make a noise in his study or bedroom when he purposely retires from all worldly employments. So does a well-tempered spirit. It may enquire about things abroad, out of doors in the world; and allow some ordinary cares and fears to break into the suburbs of the soul, so as to have a light touch upon the thoughts. Yet it will not, on any account, allow an intrusion into the Privy-Chamber,¹ which should be wholly reserved for Jesus Christ as his inward temple.

6. It is *opposed to sinking discouragements*. When things don’t fall out according to expectation, when the tide of second causes runs so low that we see little left in the outward means to bear up our hopes and hearts, *then* the heart begins to reason as the king’s officer did in 2Kng 7.2: *If the Lord were to open the windows of heaven, how could this be?* Never considering that God can open the eyes of the blind with clay and spittle, He can work above, beyond, and even contrary to means. He often makes the fairest flowers of man’s endeavors to wither, and brings improbable things to pass, so that the glory of the enterprises may be given to himself. Indeed, if his people stand in need of miracles to work their deliverance, miracles fall as easily out of God’s hands as to give his people daily bread. God’s blessing, many times, is so secret upon his servants, that they don’t know which way it comes from — as in 2Kng 3.17, *You won’t see wind, nor will you see rain; yet the valley shall be filled with water*. God would have us depend on Him, though we don’t see the means for bringing the thing to pass, or else we don’t show a quiet spirit. Though an affliction is upon you, don’t let your heart sink under it. So far as your heart sinks, and you are discouraged under your affliction, that is how much you lack this Lesson of Contentment.

¹ A quiet inner room, usually windowless, reserved for intimate conversation and private contemplation. The allusion is to the private apartment of a royal residence in England. The Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber were noble-born servants to the Crown, who would wait and attend on the King in private; hence, “wholly reserved for Jesus Christ.”

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7. It is *opposed to sinful shiftings and shirkings,¹ for ease and help*. We see this kind of thing in Saul running to the witch of Endor, and his offering the sacrifice before Samuel came. Indeed, the good King Jehoshaphat joins himself with Ahaziah (2Chr 20.35). And Asa goes for help to Benhadad, King of Syria, not relying on the Lord (2Chr 16.7-8) — even though the Lord had delivered the Ethiopian army into his hands, consisting of a thousand thousand (2Chr 14.11-12). And good Jacob joined with his mother in a lie to Isaac. He wasn't content to await God's time, and use God's means, but made too great a haste; he stepped out of his way to procure the blessing which God intended for him. Many do this through the corruption of their hearts, and weakness of their faith, because they're not able to trust God, and follow him fully in all things and all ways. And for this cause, the Lord often follows the saints with many sore temporal crosses (as we see in Jacob), even though they obtain the mercy. It may be that your wretched carnal heart thinks, "I don't care *how* I am delivered, if only I may get free from it." Isn't it this way many times in some of your hearts, when any cross or affliction befalls you? Don't you have this kind of working of spirit? "Oh, if I could only be delivered from this affliction in any way, I wouldn't care *how*?" Your hearts are far from being quiet. And this sinful shifting is the next thing in opposition to this quietness which God requires in a contented spirit.

8. The last thing that this quietness of spirit is opposite to, is *desperate risings of the heart against God, in a way of rebellion*. This is most abominable. I hope many of you have learned to be content so far as to keep your hearts from such distempers. And yet the truth is, not only wicked men, but sometimes the very saints of God, find the beginnings of this when an affliction lies a long time, and is very sore and heavy upon them indeed; and it strikes them, as it were, in the master-vein. They find something of this arising in their hearts against God; their thoughts begin to boil, and their affections begin to stir in rising against God himself — especially those who, together with their corruptions, have great melancholy. And the Devil is working upon both the corruptions of their hearts, and the melancholy distemper of their bodies. Though much grace may lie at the bottom, yet there may be some rising against God himself under affliction.

Now, Christian quietness is opposite in all these things. That is, when afflictions come, whatever affliction it may be, you don't murmur. Though you are sensible of it, though you moan, though you desire to be delivered, and seek that by all good means — yet you don't murmur or repine, you don't fret or vex. There isn't that tumultuous spirit in you; there isn't unsettledness in your spirit; there aren't disquieting fears in your heart; no sinking discouragements, no base shiftings, no rising in rebellion in any way against God. *This* is quietness of spirit under an affliction.

That's the second thing: when the soul is so far able to bear an affliction as to keep quiet under it.

Thirdly, it is an *inward, quiet, gracious FRAME of spirit*. It is a frame of spirit, and a *gracious* frame of spirit. Contentment is a *soul-business*. First, it is *inward*; Secondly, it is *quiet*; Thirdly, it is a quiet *frame* of spirit. By that, I mean these three things: there are three things to consider when I say, Contentment consists in the quiet *frame* of the spirit of a man.

1. *First, it is a grace that spreads itself through the whole soul.*

As such, it is in the **judgment**; that is, the *judgment* of the soul of a man or woman tends to quiet the heart. "In my *judgment*, I am satisfied." So that is one thing, to be satisfied in one's judgment and understanding — such as, This is the hand of God; and this is what is suitable to my condition, or best for me. Although I don't see the reason for the thing, yet I am satisfied in my judgment about it.

And then it is in the **thoughts** of a man or woman. As my judgment is satisfied, so my thoughts are kept in order.

¹ *Shiftings* are contrivances used to attain an end by our own means; *shirkings* are excuses to avoid our duties.

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And then it comes to the *will*. *My will yields and submits to it; my affections are all likewise kept in order, so that it goes through the whole soul.* In some, there is a *partial* contentment; and so it isn't the frame of the whole soul, but some *part* of the soul has contentment. As such, many a man may be satisfied in his judgment about a thing, and yet he cannot for his life rule his *affections*, nor his *thoughts*. He cannot rule his *thoughts*, nor the *will*, nor the *affections*, even though his *judgment* is satisfied.

I don't question that many of you may know this by your own experience, if you but observe the workings of your own hearts. Can't you say, when such an affliction befalls you, "I can bless God; I am satisfied in my judgment about it; I see the hand of God, and I *should* be content. Yes, I am satisfied in my judgment that the condition in which I find myself is a *good* condition. But I cannot for the life of me rule my *thoughts*, and my *will*, and my *affections*. I think I feel my heart is heavy, and sad, and troubled more than it should be — *and yet my judgment is satisfied.*"

This seemed to be the position of David in Psalm 42: *O my soul, why are you disquieted?* For David, so far as his judgment went, there was a contentedness; that is, his judgment was satisfied as to the work of God on him. And he was troubled, but he didn't know why: *O my soul, why are you cast down within me?* That is a very good psalm for those to be reading or singing, who at any time feel a fretting, discontented distemper in their hearts. He has it once or twice in that Psalm, *Why are you cast down, O my soul?* In verse 5, *And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him for the help of His countenance.* David had enough to quiet him; and what he had, prevailed with his judgment. But after it had prevailed with his judgment, he couldn't get it any further. He couldn't get this Grace of Contentment to go through the whole frame of the soul.

There is a great deal of stir sometimes to get contentment into people's judgments; that is, to satisfy their judgment about their condition. Come to many whom the hand of God is upon, perhaps in a grievous way, and try to satisfy them, and tell them that there's no cause to be so disquieted. A troubled spirit will say, "Oh, no cause? Then there is no cause for *anyone* to be disquieted. There was never any such an affliction as I have." And they have a hundred things to deflect the force of what is said to them, so that you cannot so much as get into their judgments to satisfy them.

But there is a great deal of hope of contentment, once your judgment does come to be satisfied. *Then* you can sit down and say in your judgment, I see good cause to be contented. But though you've gotten this far, you may still have much to do with your *hearts* afterward. For there is such unruliness in our *thoughts* and *affections*, that our judgments are not always able to rule our thoughts and affections. And that makes me say that contentment is an inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit; that is, the *whole* soul — judgment, thoughts, will, affections, and all — is satisfied and quiet. I suppose in just opening this, you begin to see that it's a lesson you need to learn. And if contentment is such a thing as this, it's not something soon gotten.

2. *Spiritual contentment comes from the frame of the soul.*

This second thing is very observable. A man or woman who is contented in a right way, has contentment that doesn't come so much from outward arguments, or any outward thing which helps them to be content, as it does from the disposition of their own hearts. It is the disposition of their own hearts that *causes* this contentment, that *brings forth* this gracious contentment, rather than any external thing that does it.

Let me open it this way: take someone who is disquieted, maybe a child, or a man, or a woman. If you come and bring them some great matter to *please* them, that perhaps will *quiet* them, and they will be *contented*. It is the thing you bring them that quiets them, and not the disposition of their own spirits. It is not from any good temper in their own hearts, but from some *external* thing that is brought to them. But when Christians are contented in a right way, the quiet comes more

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from the inward temper ¹ and disposition of their own hearts, than from any external arguments, or the possession of anything in the world.

I would open this still further with this analogy. Being content from some *external thing*, is like warming a man's clothes by the fire. But being content by the *inward disposition* of the soul, is like the warmth a man's clothes have from the natural heat of his body. A man who has a healthy body, puts on his clothes and perhaps, when he puts them on at first on a cold morning, his clothes are cold. But after he has them on a while, they are warm. How did they come to be warm? They didn't come near the fire. No, it came from the natural heat of his body. Now, a sickly man who has his natural heat decayed, if he puts on his clothes cold, they won't be hot for a long time. He must have them warmed by the fire; yet once on, they quickly become cold again.

So this differentiates the contentments of men. There are some men who are very gracious. And when an affliction comes upon them, though it seems a little cold at first, after it has been on them a while, the very temper of their hearts, being gracious, makes their afflictions easy. It makes them quiet under it, and not complain of any discontentment. But you have others who have an affliction upon them, who don't have this good temper in their heart. Their afflictions are very cold upon them, and grievous. And it may be that if you bring them some external arguments, something from without — like the fire that warms the clothes — perhaps they'll be quiet for a while. But, alas, lacking a gracious disposition within their own hearts, that warmth won't last long. The warmth of the fire — that is, a contentment that comes merely from external arguments — won't last long. But that which comes from the gracious temper of the spirit will last. True contentment is from the frame and the disposition of the spirit of a man or woman. But we'll speak about this further in opening the *Mystery of Contentment*.

3. The third thing is this: *It is the frame of spirit that shows the habitualness of this Grace of Contentment*.

Contentment is not merely one act, a flash of a good mood. You have many men and women who, if you find them in a good mood, will be very quiet. But this will not last. This is not in a constant way. There isn't a constant tenor ² of their spirits to be holy and gracious under affliction. But I say, keep a quiet *frame* of spirit. By that I mean the habitual disposition of their souls; so that it is not only at this time or other that you find men and women in a good mood, but it is the constant tenor and temper of their heart. That is, a Christian who has learned this Lesson of Contentment, who is contented in the constant tenor and temper of his heart, can carry himself quietly in a constant way — or else it is worth nothing. For there is no one who is so furious in his discontent, who will not be quiet in some good mood or other.

So *first*, contentment is a heart-business; *secondly*, it is a quiet heart; and then *thirdly*, it is the frame of the heart.

4. Fourthly, *it is the gracious frame of the heart*. Indeed, in contentment there is a composition of *all* graces. If the contentment is spiritual — if it is truly Christian — then there is, I say, a composition of *all spiritual graces*. As some oils are composed of a great many very precious ingredients; so it is in this Grace of Contentment. We will speak still further of this in the opening of its excellency. But for now, *the gracious frame of spirit* is in opposition to three things:

(1.) *As opposed to the natural stillness in many men and women*. There are some who are of such a natural constitution, that it makes them more still and quiet than others. Others are of a violent and hot constitution, and they are more impatient than others.

¹ *Temper*: a state of mind; a tendency to be in a certain type of mood; a habitual way of thinking, behaving, or reacting.

² *Tenor*: duration or continuance; a state of holding on in a continuous course; general tendency.

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(2.) *As opposed to a sturdy resolution* (or resoluteness). Some men, through the strength of a sturdy resolution, don't seem to be troubled, come what will. And so it may be that through a sturdy resolution, sometimes they are not so disquieted as others.

(3.) *As opposed to the strength of natural reason* (though not satisfied by it), *which may quiet the heart in some measure.*

But now I say, a gracious frame of spirit is not a mere stillness of the body through a natural constitution and temper; nor through a sturdy resolution; nor merely through the strength of reason.

You might ask, In what is the Grace of Contentment distinguished from all these? More of this will be spoken of when we show the Mystery of it, and the Lessons that are learned. But for now, we may say a little by way of distinction from the natural stillness of men's spirits. Many men and women have such a natural stillness of spirit, and constitution of body, that you seldom find them disquieted. Now, mark the kind of people who are this way, and they are likewise dulled,¹ of a very dull spirit in any good things — they have no quickness or liveliness of spirit in what is good.

But mark where the contentment of heart is *gracious* — the heart is very quick and lively in the service of God. Indeed, the more a gracious heart can bring itself to be in a contented disposition, the more fit it is for any service of God. It is very active and lively in God's service, not dull. And as a contented heart is very active and stirring in the work of God, so he is very active and stirring in sanctifying God's name in any affliction that befalls him.²

The difference will appear very clear by this: someone with a still disposition is not as disquieted indeed as others are; nor does he have an active spirit in sanctifying the name of God in the affliction that befalls him. But someone who is content in a gracious way, as he is not disquieted, but keeps his heart quiet in respect to vexing and trouble, so on the other side, he isn't dull or heavy, but is very active to sanctify God's name in the affliction that is upon him. For it is not enough merely *not* to murmur, and *not* to be discontented and troubled. But you must be active in sanctifying God's name in the affliction. Indeed, this will distinguish a gracious heart from a sturdy resolution that, "I will not be troubled." But if you have a sturdy resolution that you won't be troubled, are you scrupulous to sanctify God's name in your affliction? Does it come from there? That's the main thing that brings quiet to the heart, and helps against the discontentedness in a gracious heart. I say, the desire and care that your soul has, to sanctify God's name in an affliction — *this* is what quiets the soul, which it does not do in the other.

Neither when it is merely from reason. As with Socrates, it is said of him (though he was but a heathen) that whatever befell him, he would never so much as change his countenance. And he got this power over his spirit merely by strength of Reason and Morality. But now, this *gracious* contentment comes from principles beyond the strength of Reason. I cannot open that (where it comes from) till we come to open the Mystery of Spiritual Contentment.

I will only give you this one note of difference between a man or a woman who is contented in a *natural* way, and another who is contented a *spiritual* way: Those who are contented in a natural way, overcome *themselves* when outward afflictions befall them. They are contented, yes, but they are contented as well when they sin against God. Whether they have outward crosses to bear, or God is dishonored by their sin, it's all one to them — either when they are crossed themselves, or God is crossed. But now, a *gracious* heart that is contented with its own affliction, and yet mightily rises when *God* is dishonored.³

¹ This doesn't mean dull-witted; rather, it is unresponsive to or unconcerned with what is good; so they're not easily rattled when what is good is at risk; in a sense, they're clueless. They under-react instead of over-react.

² To sanctify God's name in affliction, is to admit He is blameless in bringing it to us. More of this in Sermon 10.

³ That is, it takes exception; it rises to meet the challenge, to defend the name of God, as David did with Goliath.

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5. Fifthly, *it is freely submitting to and taking satisfaction in God's disposal*. It is a *free* work of the spirit. Now, there are four things to be explained in this Freedom of the Spirit:

(1.) The heart is readily brought over. That which someone does freely, requires no great stir to bring them to do it. ¹ There are many men and women who, when their afflictions are grievous, are brought to be contented only with much ado. There is a great deal of stir to quiet their hearts when they are under affliction, until at last perhaps they are brought to it. Yes, but this doesn't come off freely. If I desire one thing or another, and I get it perhaps with much ado and a great deal of stir, there's no freedom of spirit in that. But when a man is free in a thing, simply mention it, and he quickly comes to it. So if you've learned this Art of Contentment, you won't be contented to quiet your hearts only after much ado, but you will come to it readily. And as soon as you come to think that it is the hand of God, your heart will quickly embrace it.

(2.) It is done *freely*, that is, *not by constraint* — it is not patience by force (as we used to say). Many say you *must* be content, for this is the hand of God, and there is no help for it. O this is too low an expression for Christians. Yet when Christians visit one another, this is what they say, *You must be content* — No, I will be content *readily and freely*. It is suitable to my heart to yield to God, and to be content. I find it is something that comes off by itself, that my soul will be content. Oh! You should answer your friends this way, who come and tell you that you *must* be content: “No, I am *willing* to yield to God, and I am *freely* content.” That's the second.

(3) And then, a free act comes in *a rational way*; that's freedom. It doesn't come through ignorance — just because I don't know of a better condition, or I don't know what affliction is. Rather, it comes through a *sanctified judgment*; for that is the reason that no creature except a rational creature can do an act of freedom. The liberty of action is only in rational creatures. and it comes from this. For that alone is freedom, and out of liberty that's wrought in a rational way. This is what rational freedom is: when by my judgment I see what is to be done, I understand the thing, and then I embrace what I understand, in my judgment — *that* is freely done.

But if a man does anything and *doesn't* understand what he does, then he cannot be said to do it freely. Suppose a child is born in prison, and never went out all his life. He is contented, but why? Because he never knew any better; but this is not a free act of contentment. For men and women who know better, who know that the condition they're in is afflicted and sad, and yet they bring their hearts to contentment out of a sanctified judgment — *this* is freedom.

(4.) Fourthly, *this freedom is in opposition to stupidity*; for a man or woman may be contented merely out of a lack of sense. This isn't free, just as a man in paralysis,² who doesn't feel you nip his flesh, isn't freely patient with your doing that. But if someone's flesh is nipped, and he *feels* it, then whatever he can do to bridle himself, and do it freely, that's another matter. So it is here: many are contented merely out of stupidity. They have a paralysis upon them. But a gracious heart has sense enough, and yet is contented, and therefore it is free.

6. Sixthly, *It is freely submitting to and taking satisfaction in God's disposal*. Submitting to God's disposal — what's that? The word *submit* signifies nothing else but to *send under*. Thus, in one who is discontented, the heart is unruly and would even get above God, so far as discontentment prevails. But now comes the Grace of Contentment, and sends it under. To submit is to send under a thing. Now, when my soul comes to see the unruliness that is in it, and the hand of God brings an affliction, and my heart is troubled and discontented by it, what does my soul say? “Would you be above God? Isn't this God's hand, and must your will be regarded more than God's? O, under, under! Get under, O soul! Keep under! Keep low! 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! *Keep under*

¹ Here, *stir* means a disturbance; someone is resistant to it, and must be provoked against their desire.

² Originally, a *dead palsy*.

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— *that* is, submit. The soul can submit to God when it can send itself under the Power, and Authority, and Sovereignty, and Dominion that God has over it. That is the sixth particular.

Yes, but that's not enough. You haven't gotten to this Grace of Contentment, unless in the next place, you take the seventh particular.

7. Seventhly, *It is taking satisfaction in God's disposal*, which means this: I am well pleased in what God does, so far as I can see God at work in it. Though, as I said, I may be sensible of the affliction, and may desire that God would remove it in his due time, and use means to remove it — yet I may be well pleased in so far as God's hand is in it. To be well pleased with God's hand is a higher degree than the sixth particular. It comes from this: it is not only because I see that I *should* be content in this affliction, but because I also see that there is *good* in the affliction itself. I find there is honey in this rock. And so I not only say I *must*, or I *will* submit to God's hand — no, the hand of God is *good*; it is *good that I am afflicted*. Thinking that I'm afflicted *justly* — that may be found in someone who is not truly contented. I may be convinced that God deals justly in this, that God is righteous and just, and it's fitting that I should submit to what He has done. *O the Lord has done righteously in all His ways!* (Psa 145.17) But that is not enough! You must say, Good is the hand of the Lord — the expression of old Eli, *Good is the word of the Lord*, even when it was a sore and hard word (1Sam 3.17-18). That word threatened very grievous things to Eli and his house; and yet Eli says, *Good is the word of the Lord*. Perhaps, some of you may say, as David did, *It is good that I was afflicted* (Psa 119.71). No, *you* must come to say it this way: *It is good that I am afflicted* — not good once you see the good fruit that it has wrought, but *when* you are afflicted, to say, It is good that I *am* afflicted. Whatever the affliction is, through the mercy of God, my condition is a *good* condition. It is indeed the top, and the height of this Art of Contentment, to come to this pitch and be able to say, “Well, my condition and afflictions are thus and so, and they are very grievous and sore. Yet through God's mercy, I am in a good condition, and the hand of God is good upon me notwithstanding.

Now, I should have given you various Scriptures about this; but I will give you one or two that are very remarkable. You'll think this is a hard lesson to come this far: not only to be quiet, but to have satisfaction in affliction. Pro 15.6, *In the house of the righteous is much treasure, but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble*. Here's a Scripture now that will show that a gracious heart has cause to say it is in a good condition, whatever it is. In the house of the righteous is much treasure; in his house — *what* house? It may be a poor cottage; perhaps he has scarcely a stool to sit on; perhaps he is glad to sit upon a stump of wood, or a piece of a block, instead of a stool; or perhaps he has scarcely a bed to lie on, or a dish to eat on. Yet the Holy Ghost says, *In the house of the righteous is much treasure*. Suppose the righteous man is the poorest man in the world. It may be there are some who have come and taken all the goods out of his house for a debt; perhaps his house is plundered, and all is gone. Yet still, *In the house of the righteous is much treasure*. The righteous man can never be brought to be so poor — to have his house rifled and spoiled — that there won't remain much treasure within. If he has but a dish or a spoon, or anything in the world in his house, there will be much treasure — so long as *he* is there. God's presence is upon it, and the blessing of God is upon him, and in this there is much treasure. But in the revenues of the wicked there is trouble. There is more treasure in the poorest body's house, if he is godly, than in the house of the greatest man in the world, who has his fine hangings and finely wrought beds, and chairs, and couches, and cupboards of plates, and the like. Whatever he has, he doesn't have as much treasure in it, as in the house of the poorest righteous soul.

Therefore, in a verse or two after my text, it is no marvel that Paul says he is content. You'll see in Phi 4.18, *But I have all, and abound; I am full* (Phi 4.18). I have all? Alas, poor man! What did Paul have that could make him say he had all? Was there ever a man more afflicted than Paul was? Many times he didn't have tatters to hang about his body, to cover his nakedness; he didn't have bread to eat; he was often in nakedness, and put in the stocks, and whipped, and cruelly used. *Yet*

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I have all (says Paul), despite all that. Yes, you'll find it in 2Cor6.10. He professes there that he possessed all things: *as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.*

But mark what he says: *as having nothing, yet possessing all things.* He doesn't say it is *like possessing all things*, but in fact *possessing all things*. It may be very little that I have in the world, *yet possessing all things*. So you see, a Christian has cause to take satisfaction in God's hand, whatever his hand may be.

8. The eighth thing in contentment is *submitting to and taking satisfaction in God's disposal*. That is, the soul that has learned this lesson of contentment, looks up to God in all things, not down to the instruments or the means, as if a man did it; and to the unreasonableness of such and such instruments, and the like barbarous usage of them. Rather, he looks up to God; a contented heart looks to God's disposal, and submits to God's disposal — that is, he sees the wisdom of God in it all. In his submission, he sees His sovereignty; but what makes him take satisfaction, is God's wisdom. "The Lord knows how to order things better than I do. The Lord sees further than I do. I see things only at present, but the Lord sees a great while from now. And how do I know but that had it not been for this affliction, I would have been undone? *I know that the love of God may stand as well with an afflicted estate, as with a prosperous one.*" There are such reasonings of this kind in a contented spirit, submitting to the disposal of God.

9. The last thing is, *this contentment is in every condition*. It may be that in some things you could be content. You have many who say, If my affliction were only like the affliction of someone like *that*, I could be content. But it must be in the *present* affliction that is upon you. We used to say, *There is a great deal of deceit in universal statements*. In general, if you come to any man or woman and say, "Won't you be content with God's disposal?" Yes, they say, God forbid that we wouldn't submit to His hand, whatever it is." You say, *in general*, it an easy matter to learn this lesson. But when it comes to the particular, when the cross comes to the fore indeed, when it strikes you with the heaviest cross you think could befall you, what does your heart say now? Can you be content in *every* condition, not only as to the matter of it, but for the time of it? That is, to be in such a condition so long as God would have you; to be content to be at God's time in that condition; to have such an affliction so long as God would have the affliction abide upon you? To be willing to stay, and not to come out of the affliction sooner than the Lord would have you come out of it? You are not content in your condition otherwise. To be content merely that I *have* such a hand of God upon me, and not to *stay* under the hand of God, that is *not* to be content under every condition. But, when I can find my heart submitting to God's disposal in those particular afflictions which are very hard and very grievous, and yet my heart is quiet — here is someone who has learned the Lesson of Contentment.

Contentment is the inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, freely submitting to and taking satisfaction in God's disposal, in every condition. *That* is the description. Now, in this there have been nine distinct things opened to explain what contentment is:

1. A heart-work within the soul.
2. The quieting of the heart.
3. The frame of the spirit.
4. A gracious frame.
5. The free working of this gracious frame.
6. A submission to God, sending the soul under God.
7. Taking satisfaction in the hand of God.
8. Submitting *all* to God's disposal.
9. In every condition, however hard, and however long it continues.

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Now, those of you who have learned to be content, have learned to attain to these several things. The very opening of these things, I hope may so far work upon your hearts, that *first*, upon what has been said, in telling you what the lesson is, it may cause you to lay your hands on your hearts and say, "Lord, I see there is more in Christian contentment than I thought there was, and I have been far from learning this lesson. Indeed, I have but learned my ABC's in this Lesson of Contentment. I am only in the lower form in Christ's School, if I am in it at all."

But we'll speak more to these things afterward. The special thing I aimed at in the opening of this point, is to show how great a Mystery there is in Christian Contentment, and how many distinct lessons are to be learned, so that we may attain to this heavenly disposition that Paul attained to.

Sermon 2: The Art and Mystery of Contentment.

at Stepney, Thursday, Aug. 3, 1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

We made an entrance (you may remember) into the argument about Christian Contentment. And we opened the words, and showed you what this Christian Contentment is: that it is the inward, quiet, gracious frame of the spirit, freely submitting to, and taking satisfaction in God's disposal in every condition. And in this, we came to this last thing: that we are to be content in *every* condition. Now we'll enlarge on that a little, and so we proceed. Contentment is submitting to God, in whatever affliction befalls us,

1. *First, as to its kind.*
2. *For the time and continuance of the affliction.*
3. *For the variety and changes of affliction.*

Whatever these may be, we must submit to God's disposal in every condition.

1. *First, for the kind of affliction.* Many men and women will, in general, say that they must submit to God in affliction; I suppose now, if you were to go from one end of this congregation to the other, and speak this way to every soul: "Wouldn't you submit to God's disposal, in whatever condition he might place you?" Each would say, "God forbid that it should be otherwise!" But we used to say, *There is a great deal of deceit in generalities.* In general, you would submit to anything. But what if it's in this or that particular, which is most cross to you? ¹ when it comes to the particular case, when the cross comes to the fore, indeed, when it strikes you with the heaviest cross that you think could befall you, what does your heart say now? ² Then it is anything *but* that. We are apt to think that any condition is better than the condition that God disposes us to. Here is *not* contentment. It should be not only as to any condition *in general*, but for the particular *kind* of condition, even if it is that which is most cross to you. God (it may be) strikes you in your child. Oh! If it had been my estate, says one, I would be content! Perhaps he strikes you in your match (your engagement or marriage). Oh, he says, I would rather have been stricken in my health. And if he had struck you in your health, then it is, Oh, if it had been my trade, I wouldn't have cared. But we must not be our own carvers. *Whatever* particular afflictions God disposes us to, we must be content in them.

2. Secondly, there must be a submission to God in every affliction, *as to the time and continuance of the affliction.* It may be, says one, I could submit to this and be content; but this affliction has been on me a long time, a quarter of a year, a year, a number of years, and I don't know how to yield and submit to it. My patience is worn and even broken. Yes, it may be that it is a *spiritual* affliction. You could submit to God, you say, in any *outward* affliction, but not in a *soul*-affliction. Or if it were an affliction upon the soul, trouble upon the heart, if it were the withdrawing of God's face — "If this had been but for a little time, I could submit. But seeking God for so long a time, and yet God doesn't appear. Oh, how shall I bear this?" We must not be our own disposers for the *time* of deliverance, any more than for the *kind* and *way* of deliverance.

I will give you a Scripture or two about this. That we are to submit to God for the *time*, as well as the *kind* of affliction, is found at the end of the first chapter of Ezekiel (Eze 1.28-2.2): *When I saw it I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one who spoke.* The Prophet was cast down upon his face, but how long must he lie upon his face? *And he said to me, Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you. And the spirit entered into me when he spoke to me, and set me on my*

¹ *Most cross*: most opposite; most *counter* to your own desires, plans, and aspirations.

² Burroughs is summarizing the last point in his previous sermon, in order to enlarge on it here.

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feet. Ezekiel was cast down upon his face, and there he must lie till God bids him to stand up. Yes, and not only so, but till God's Spirit came into him to *enable* him to stand up. So too, when God casts us down, we must be content to lie there till God bids us to stand up, and God's Spirit enters into us to enable us to stand up.

So you know Noah. He was put into the Ark — certainly, he knew there was much affliction in the Ark, having all kinds of creatures shut up with him for twelve months together. It was a mighty thing; yet God shut him up even after the waters subsided. Noah was not to come out of the Ark till God bid him. So too, though we are shut up in great afflictions, and may think there is this, or that, or the other means to come out of that affliction, till God opens the door, we should be willing to stay. God has put us in, and God will bring us out.

So we read about Paul in the Acts (16.36-37), when they had shut him in prison (illegally), and sent to have him come out. No, says Paul, *they* shut us in; let *them* come and fetch us out. So too, in a holy gracious way, a soul should say, Well, this affliction that I have been brought into, is by the hand of God (justly); and I am content to be here till God brings me out Himself. God requires at our hands, that we not be willing to come out till He comes and fetches us out.

In Josh 4.10-11, we have a notable history that may very well serve our purpose. We read of the priests, that they bore the ark, and stood in the midst of Jordan — you know, when the Children of Israel went into the land of Canaan, they went through the river Jordan. Now, going through the river Jordan was a very dangerous thing. Only, God *bid* them to go. They might have been afraid that the water would come in upon them. But mark it is said,

The priests who bore the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan till everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak to the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua; and the people hastened and passed over: And it came to pass, when all the people had completely passed over, that the ark of the Lord and the priests passed over, in the presence of the people.

Now, it was God's disposal that all the people should pass over first, that they should be safe on land. But the priests must stand still till all the people had passed over; and then they would have leave to go. But they must stay till God would have them go — *stay* in all that danger! For certainly, in reason and sense, there was a great deal of danger in staying. For the text says, *the people hastened over*; but the priests must stay till the people have gone — stay till God calls them out from that place of danger. And so, many times it proves that God is pleased to dispose of things in a way that the Minister must stay longer in danger than the people; and magistrates and those in public positions. This should make people satisfied and content with a lower position into which God has put them. Though your position is low, yet you are not in the same danger that those are in, who are in a higher position. God calls those in public positions to stand longer in the gap and place of danger, than other people. But we must be content to stay even in the Jordan, till the Lord is pleased to call us out.

3. *And then, for the variety of our condition*, we must be content with the particular affliction, and with the time, and with all the circumstances surrounding the affliction — for sometimes the circumstances are greater afflictions than the afflictions themselves. And as for the variety, if God exercises us with various afflictions, one after another, as has been very observable even of late, that many of those who have been plundered and come away, have afterwards fallen sick and died. They have fled for their lives; and afterwards the plague has come among them;¹ and if not *that* affliction, it may be some other. It is very rare that one affliction comes alone. Commonly, afflictions are not single things, but they come one upon the neck of another. It may be that God strikes one in his estate, then in his body, then in his name, wife, child, or dear friend — and so, it

¹ The Black Death killed thousands in London. There were nearly 40 major outbreaks between 1348 and 1665, every 20-30 years. It killed about 20% of London's population each time. So the plague was very familiar to the congregation.

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comes in a variety of ways. It is the way of God ordinarily (as you may find by experience) that seldom does one affliction come alone. Now, this is *hard* when one affliction follows another, when there is a variety of afflictions, when there is a mighty change in a condition — up and down, this way, and that. There indeed, is the trial of a Christian.

Now there must be submission to God's disposal in them. I remember it was said, even of Cato who was a Heathen, that no man saw him changed, even though he lived in a time when the commonwealth was so often changed. Yet it is said of him, that *he* was the same still, though his condition was changed. And he ran through a variety of conditions. Oh that this could be said of many Christians, that though their *conditions* are changed, nobody can see *them* changed; they are the same. Look what a gracious, sweet, and holy temper they were in before; they are in it still. Thus are we to submit to the disposal of God in every condition.

Objection. But you will say: What you speak of is good indeed, if we could attain to it; but is it *possible* for someone to attain to this?

Answer. It is. If you get skill in the Art of it, you may attain to it. And it will not prove to be such a difficult thing for you either, if you but understand the mystery of it. As there are many things that men do in their callings, that if a countryman comes and sees it, he thinks it is a mighty hard thing, and that he would never be able to do it. But that's because he doesn't understand the art of it — there is a turning of the hand, so that you may do it with ease. Now, that's the business of this exercise,¹ to open to you *the Art and Mystery of Contentment*.

Whatever way a Christian comes to contentment, there is a great Mystery and Art in it. By what has been opened to you, there will appear to be some mystery and art in it — such as, that a man should be *content* with his affliction, and yet be thoroughly *sensible* of his affliction too. To be thoroughly sensible of an affliction and to endeavor removing it by all lawful means, and yet to be content with it — there's a mystery in that, in how to join these two together — to be sensible of an affliction, as much as that man or woman who is *not* content with it. I am sensible of it as fully as they are; and I seek ways to be delivered from it as well as they do — and yet *still* my heart abides content. This, I say, is a mystery that is very hard for a carnal heart to understand. But grace teaches such a mixture; it teaches us how to make a mixture of sorrow and joy together. And that makes for contentment — the mingling of joy and sorrow, of *gracious* joy and *gracious* sorrow, together. Grace teaches us how to moderate and to order an affliction, so there will be a sense of it, and yet for all that, contentment under it.

There are several things for opening the Mystery of Contentment.

1. The first thing is this: *to show that there is indeed a great mystery in it.*

It may be said of someone who is contented in a Christian way, that he is the most *contented* man in the world, and also the most *unsatisfied* man in the world, These two things together, are necessarily mysterious. I say, a contented man, as he is the most contented, so he is the most unsatisfied of any man in the world. You have never learned the mystery of contentment unless it may be said of you, that just as you are the most contented man, so you are the most unsatisfied man in the world.

You may ask, *How is that?* A man who has learned the Art of Contentment, is most contented with any low condition that he has in the world; and yet he cannot be satisfied by the enjoyment of the whole world. He is contented if he has but a crust — only bread and water. That is, if God so disposes the things of the world to him, as to have but bread and water for his present condition,

¹ That is, this sermon. "Exercise" is defined as systematic training by multiple repetitions; a task performed in order to develop a skill or understanding. That's an excellent way to look at how sermons serve to equip the saints.

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he can be satisfied with God's disposal. And yet, if God were to give him Kingdoms and Empires, the whole world to rule, if He gave it to him for his portion, he wouldn't be satisfied by that.¹

Here's the mystery of it: though his 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, even if God gives him but bread and water. To join these two together, this is necessarily *a great Art and Mystery*. Though he is contented with God in a little, yet those things that would content other men, will not content him. The men of the world seek after estates, and think if they had this much, or that much, they would be content. They aim at no great matters. But if I had (perhaps some man thinks) only two or three hundred a year, then I would be well enough. If I had but five hundred a year, or a thousand a year (says another), then I would be satisfied. But a gracious heart says that if he had ten hundred thousand times so much a year, it wouldn't satisfy him. If he had the quintessence of all the excellencies of all the creatures in the world, it couldn't satisfy him. And yet this man can sing, and be merry, and joyful, when he has but a crust of bread, and a little water in this world. *Surely religion is a great mystery*. Great is the mystery of godliness, not only in the doctrinal part of it, but in the practical part of it also. Godliness teaches us this mystery of not being satisfied with all the world for our portion; and yet being content with the meanest condition in which we find ourselves.

When Luther had great gifts sent to him by Dukes and Princes, he refused them. He says, "I vehemently protested that God should not put me off so; 'tis not what will content me." A little in the world will content a Christian for his passage. Note that here lies the mystery of it: 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*. Now, a *carnal* heart will be content with these things of the world for his portion; and there is the difference between a Carnal heart and a Gracious heart. But, says a gracious heart, "Lord, do with me what you will for my passage through this world; I will be content with that. But I cannot be content with all the world for my portion." So there's the Mystery of True Contentment. A contented man, though he is most contented with the least things in the world, yet he is the most unsatisfied man that lives in the world.²

That soul which is capable of God, can be filled with nothing else but God; nothing but God can fill a soul that is capable of God. Though a gracious heart knows that it is capable of God, and was made for God, a carnal heart thinks with no reference to God. But a gracious heart, being enlarged to be capable of God, and enjoying something of Him — nothing in the world can then fill it; it must be only God himself. And therefore you will observe that whatever God gives to a gracious heart, a heart that is godly, unless He gives Himself, it will not do. A godly heart will not only have the mercy, but the God of that mercy as well. And then a little matter is enough in the world, so long as he has the God of that mercy he enjoys. I need go no further to show a notable Scripture for this. In Phi 4.7 and 9, compare the two verses:

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.

The peace of God shall keep your hearts. Then in verse 9:

Those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you. The peace of God shall keep you, and the God of peace shall be with you.

This is what I would observe from this text — that the peace of God is not enough for a gracious heart, unless it may have the God of that peace. A carnal heart could be satisfied if he might but

¹ **Mat 16:26** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?

² This point is treated at large in Burroughs' sermon on Psalm 17.14, entitled, "The misery of those men who have their portion in this life."

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have outward peace, even if it is not the peace of God. Peace in the State, and in his trading would satisfy him. But mark how a godly heart goes beyond a carnal heart — all outward peace is not enough; it must have the peace of God. But suppose you have the peace of God. Won't that quiet you? No, I must also have the God of peace — as the peace of God, so the God of peace. That is, I must enjoy that God who gives me the peace; I must have the *cause* as well as the *effect*. I must see where my peace comes from, and enjoy the *Fountain* of my peace, as well as the *Stream* of my peace. And so it is in other mercies: do I have health from God? Then I must have the God of my health to be my portion, or else I am not satisfied. It is not life, but the God of my life; it is not riches, but the God of those riches that I must have; the God of my preservation, as well as my preservation. A gracious heart is not satisfied without this: to have the God of the mercy, as well as the mercy.

In Psa 73.25, *Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides you.* It is nothing in heaven or earth that can satisfy me, but yourself. If God gives you not only earth but heaven, that you should rule over Sun, Moon, and Stars, and have the rule over the highest of the sons of men, it would not be enough to satisfy you, unless you had God himself.

There lies the first mystery of contentment. And truly, a contented man, though he is the most contented man in the world, is the most dissatisfied man in the world; that is, those things that will satisfy the world, will not satisfy him.

2. Secondly, there is this Mystery in Christian Contentment: *A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction.*

That is his way of contentment, and that is a way that the world has no skill in. I open it this way: 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 carnal heart knows no way to be contented but this: I have such and such an estate, and if I had this added to it, and the other comfort added that I don't have now, *then* I would be contented. It may be that I have lost my estate; if I could only have that given to me, so as to make up my loss, *then* I would be a contented man. But now, contentment doesn't come in that way; it doesn't come in, I say, by adding to what you lack, but by subtracting from your desires. It's all the same to a Christian, either that I may get up to what I *would* have, or lower my desires to what I *do* have; either that I may attain to what I desire, or lower my desires to what I have already attained. My estate is the same, for it is as suitable to me to lower my desire to match my condition, as it is to raise up my condition to match my desire.

Now, I say that a heart that has no grace, and is not instructed in this Mystery of Contentment, knows no way to get contentment, except to have his estate raised up to his desires. But the other has another way to contentment; and that is, he can lower his desires to his estate, and so he attains to his contentment. Thus the Lord fashions the hearts of the children of men.

Now, if the heart of a man is fashioned to his condition, he may have as much contentment as if his condition were fashioned to his heart. Some men have a mighty large heart, but they have a strait condition. They can never have contentment while their hearts are big, and their condition is little. But though a man cannot bring his condition to be as great as his heart, if he can bring his heart to be as little as his condition, to bring them even, then from there comes contentment. The world is infinitely deceived in this, to think that contentment lies in having more than they have. Here lies the bottom and root of all contentment: when there is an evenness and proportion between our hearts and our conditions. And that is the reason that many who are godly men in a low condition, live sweeter and more comfortable lives than those who are richer.

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Contentment is not always clothed with silk, and purple, and velvets; but contentment is sometimes found in a russet suit,¹ in a lowly condition as well as in a higher. Many men who at one time had great estates, and God has brought them into a lower condition, have had more contentment in that condition than the other. How can that be possible? Thus easily: if you but understood that the root of contentment consists in the suitableness and proportion of the spirit of a man to his estate, in their evenness — when one end is not longer and bigger than the other — the heart is contented; there is comfort in that condition. Now, let God give a man ever so much riches, if the Lord gives him up to the pride of his heart, that man will never be contented, But now, let God bring anyone into a lowly condition, and then let God but fashion and suit his heart to that condition, and he will be content.

Suppose a man, in walking about, had a very long leg, and his other leg was short. Even though one of his legs was longer than ordinary, he couldn't go about as well as a man who has both of legs shorter than his. I compare a long leg (when one is longer than the other) to a man who has a high position, and is very rich, and a great man in the world; but he has a very proud heart too, and that is “longer and larger” than his condition. Now, this man cannot help but be troubled in his condition. Whereas another man who is in a poor condition, is low; and his heart is low too; so that his heart and his condition are both even. And this man goes about with abundantly more ease than the other.

So that, a gracious heart thinks in this manner: The Lord has been pleased to humble my condition; now if the Lord humbles my heart, and makes it even with my condition, then I am well enough. And so, when God humbles his condition, he doesn't labor so much to raise up his condition again, as to lower his heart to match his condition. Even the heathens had a little glimpse of this. They could say that *the best riches are the poverty of desires*; that is the statement of a heathen (Seneca). That is, if a man or woman have their desires cut short, and have no large desires, that man and woman are rich — when they can bring their desires to be but low. So this is the Art of Contentment: not to seek to add to our *conditions*, but to subtract from our *desires*. Another has this: *The way to be rich* (he says) *is not by increasing wealth, but by diminishing our desires*. For certainly that man or woman is rich, who has their desires satisfied. Now, a contented man has his desires satisfied; *God* satisfies his desires; that is, all things considered, he is satisfied that his condition for the present is the best condition. And so he comes to this contentment by way of *subtraction*, and not *addition*.

3. The third thing in the Art of Contentment is this: *A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by getting rid of his burden, as by adding another burden to himself.*

This is a way that flesh and blood have little skill in. You may say, How is this? In this manner: Are you are afflicted, and is there a great load and burden on you because of your affliction? You think, “There's no way in the world to get contentment but this: Oh if this burden were off! Oh! it is a heavy load, and few know what a burden I have.” What, do you think there is no way for the contentment of your spirit, except to get this burden off you? Oh, you *are* deceived. 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.

You may say, this is a strange way for a man or woman to ease their condition when they are burdened: to lay a greater burden upon them. You think there is no other way when you are afflicted, than to be jolly and merry, and get into company. Oh no! You are deceived; your burden

¹ *Russet*: a reddish-brown homespun fabric.

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will come again. Alas, this is a poor way to get his spirit quieted, poor man; the burden will be upon him again. If you would have your burden light, you must get alone and examine your heart for your sin, and charge your soul with your sin. If your burden is your estate, for the sin of abusing it; or if it's a burden on your body, for the abuse of your health; for the abuse of any mercies that the Lord has now taken away from you, because you haven't honored God with those mercies you had, but have walked wantonly and carelessly. And so, fall before the Lord; bemoan your sin and you'll quickly find the burden of your affliction is lighter than it was before. Just try this piece of skill and art, to get your souls contented with any low condition that God puts you into.

Many times in a family, when any affliction befalls them, Oh, what a deal of discontentment there is between man and wife if crossed in their landed estates, or they have bad news from the sea, or if those they trusted are broke, and the like. Perhaps something in the family falls cross between man and wife in reference to the children or servants, and there is nothing but squabbling and discontent among them. Now, many times they are burdened with their own discontent; and perhaps they say one to another, "It is very uncomfortable, for us to live so discontented as we do." But have you ever tried this way, husband and wife? Have you ever gotten alone and said, "Come, Oh let us go and humble our souls before God together; let us go into our chamber and humble our souls before God for our sin, by which we have abused those mercies that God has taken away from us; and we have provoked God against us. Oh let us charge ourselves with our sin, and be humbled before the Lord together." Have you tried such a way as this? Oh you would find the cloud would be taken away, and the sun would shine in upon you, and you would have a great deal more contentment than you've ever had.

If a man's estate is broken, either by plunderers, or in any other way. How will this man have contentment? How? By breaking his heart. *God* has broken your estate! Oh seek Him for likewise breaking your heart. Indeed, a broken estate with a whole heart, a *hard* heart, will so suit each other, that there will be no contentment. But a broken estate and a broken heart, will so suit each other, that there will be more contentment than there was before. Add therefore to the breaking of your estate, the breaking of your heart, and *that* is the way to be contented in a Christian manner, which is the third Mystery in Christian Contentment.

4. The fourth thing is, *It is not so much removing the affliction that is upon us, as changing the affliction, metamorphosing it, so that it is quite turned and changed into another thing.*

I mean in regard to the *use* of it — as for the *matter* of it, the affliction still abides. The only way of contentment for a carnal heart, is the removal of the affliction. Oh that it may be gone! But a gracious heart says, God has taught me a way for contentment, even though the affliction still continues as to the matter of it. For there is a virtue of grace to turn this affliction into good. It takes away but the sting and poison of it. And now, suppose it is poverty. A man's estate is lost. Well, is there no way to be contented till your estate is restored again, till your poverty is removed? Yes, certainly Christianity would teach there can be contentment, even though poverty continues. It will yet teach you how to turn your poverty to spiritual riches, so that, you will still be poor as to your outward estate, but *this* will be altered: whereas before, poverty was a *natural evil* to you, it is now turned into a *spiritual benefit* to you. And so you come to be content.

There is a saying of Ambrose, *Even poverty itself is riches to holy men.* Godly men make their poverty turn to riches. They get more riches out of their poverty than they ever got out of their revenues. Out of all their trading in this world, they never had such incomes as they have had out of their poverty. A carnal heart will think this strange, that a man makes poverty the most gainful trade he ever had in the world. I am persuaded that many Christians have found it so, that they have received more good by their poverty, than they ever got by all their riches. You find it in Scripture. Therefore, don't think that what I am speaking of is strange. You won't find any godly man who came out of an affliction, worse than when he went into it. Though for a while he was shaken, in the end he was better for an affliction. But you will find a great many godly men have

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been worse for their *prosperity*. Scarcely one godly man that you read about in Scripture wasn't worse for prosperity (*except for Daniel and Nehemiah*; I don't read of any hurt that they got by the prosperity they had). Scarcely (I think) is there one example of any godly man who wasn't worse for his prosperity than better. So you see, it's no strange thing, not for one who is *gracious*, that they receive good by their affliction.

Luther has such an expression in his comment on Gal 5.17. He says, *A Christian becomes a mighty Worker and a wonderful Creator* — that is (he says), to create out of heaviness *joy*, out of terror *comfort*, out of sin *righteousness*, and out of death *life*; and to bring light out of darkness. It was God's prerogative and great power, His creating power, to command the light to shine out of darkness. Now, a Christian is partaker of the divine nature; so the Scripture says (2Pet 1.4). Grace is part of the divine nature; and being part of the divine nature, it has an impression or imprint of God's omnipotent power; that is, to create light out of darkness, to bring good out of evil.

Now, a Christian comes to be content this way: God has given a Christian such a virtue, as can turn afflictions into mercies, and darkness into light. If a man had the power that Christ had when the water pots were filled, he could by a word turn the water into wine. If you who have nothing but water to drink, had the power to turn it into wine, then you might be contented. Certainly, a Christian has received this power from God, to work miraculously in this way. It is the nature of grace to turn water into wine — that is, to turn the water of your affliction, into the wine of heavenly consolation. If you understand this in a *carnal* way, I know it is ridiculous for a minister to speak this way to you; and many carnal people are ready to make such expressions as these ridiculous, by understanding them in a carnal way.

Just as Nicodemus asked, in John 3.4, *What! Can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?* So when we say of grace, that it can turn water into wine, and turn poverty into riches, and make poverty a gainful trade — a carnal heart says, "Let them have that trade if they will, and let them have water to drink, and see if they can turn it into wine." Oh, take heed that you don't speak in a scornful way of the ways of God. *Grace has the power to turn afflictions into mercies*. Two men may have the same affliction. To the one it is like gall and wormwood; yet to the other, it will be wine, and honey, and delightfulness, and joy, and advantage, and riches. This is the mystery of contentment — not so much by removing the evil, as by metamorphosing the evil, by changing the evil into good.

5. The fifth thing is, *A Christian comes to this contentment, not by making up the Wants of his condition, but by performing the Work of his condition.*

This is the way of contentment: there is some condition that I am in, with many wants; I want this and the other comfort. Well, how will I come to be satisfied and content? A carnal heart thinks, "I must have my wants made up, or else it is impossible for me to be content." But a gracious heart says, "What is the duty of the condition that God has put me into?" Yes, my condition is changed. Not long ago I was in a prosperous condition; but God has changed my condition. The Lord no longer calls me Naomi, *my delight*, but Marah, *bitterness* (Ruth 1.20). Now what am I to do? What can I think now? What are those duties that God requires of me in the condition He has now put me into? Let me put forth my strength in the performance of the duties of my present condition."

Others spend their thoughts on those things that will disturb and disquiet them; and so they grow more and more discontented. But indeed, let me spend my thoughts in thinking what my duty is. What is the duty of my present condition which I am in? "Oh," says a man whose condition is changed, and who has lost his wealth. "If only I had my wealth, as I had before, how would I use it to his glory? God has made me see that I didn't honor him with my possessions as I should have done. Oh, if I had it again, I would do better than I did before." But this may only be a temptation. You should rather think, "What does God require of me in the circumstances I am now brought into?" And you should labor to bring your heart to quiet and contentment, by setting your soul to

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work about the duties of your present condition. And the truth is, I know nothing more effective for quieting a Christian soul and getting contentment than this: setting your heart on the work surrounding the duties of your present condition that you're now in; and beware your thoughts about other conditions as a mere temptation.

I cannot compare the folly of those men and women who think to get contentment with their musing about other conditions, better than to look at the way of children. Perhaps they've gotten atop a hill, and they look a good way off and see another hill; and they think if they were on top of *that* one, they would be able to touch the clouds with their fingers. But when they *are* on top of that hill, alas, they are as far from the clouds as they were before. So it is with many who think that if they were in such and such a condition, they would have contentment; and perhaps they get into that condition, yet they are as far from contentment as before. But then they think that if they were in *another* condition, they would be contented; and then, when they've gotten into that condition, they're still as far from contentment as before. No, no, let me consider what is the duty of my *present* condition, and content my heart with it, and say, "Well, though I am now in a low condition, yet I am serving the counsels of God in the condition I'm in. It's the counsel of God that has brought me into this condition, and I desire to serve the counsel of God in that condition."

There is a notable Scripture concerning David. It is said of him that he served his generation. After he had served his generation according to the will of God, then he slept. Paul said it concerning David. It is this way in your Bibles Acts 13.36, *After he had served his own generation according to the will of God.* But the word that is translated "will," is the *counsel of God*, and so it may be translated as well, *That after David in his generation had served God's counsel, then he fell asleep.* We ordinarily take the words this way, that David *served his generation*; that is, he did the work of his generation, or served a man's generation. But it is plainer if you read it this way, *After David in his generation had served the counsel of God, then David fell asleep.* O! that should be the care of a Christian, to serve out God's counsels. What is the counsel of God? God puts me into the condition that I'm in, by His own counsel, the counsel of His own will. Now, I must serve God's counsel in my generation; whatever the counsel of God is in my condition, I must look to serve that. In doing so, I will have my heart quieted for the present. I will live and die peaceably and comfortably, if I am careful to serve God's counsel.

6. A sixth thing in the Mystery of Contentment is this: *A gracious heart is contented by melting his will and desires into God's will and desires.*

By this means, he gets contentment; this is a mystery to a carnal heart. It is not by having his own desires satisfied, as before, but by melting his will and desires into God's will. So that, he comes to have (in one sense) his desires satisfied. Even if he doesn't obtain the thing that he desired before, he still comes to be satisfied in this because he makes *his* will, all one with *God's* will. This is a little higher degree than submitting to the will of God. You all say you should submit to God's will; but a Christian has gotten beyond this. That is, he can make God's will and his own will, to be the same. So it is said of believers, that they are joined to the Lord, and are one spirit. That is, look what God's will is; I not only see reason to submit to it, but *God's* will is *my* will. When the soul can sign over (as it were) its will to God, it must then have contentment. Others would gladly get the thing they desire. But a gracious heart says, "What God would have, I would have it too; I will not only *yield* to it, but I would have it too." A gracious heart has learned this art, not only to make the Commanding will of God to be its own will — that is, what God commands me to do, I will do it — but to make the Providential will of God, and the Operative will of God, to be his will also. God commands this thing, which perhaps you who are Christians may have some skill in. But you must *will* whatever God *works*, as well as whatever God *commands*. You must make God's *Providential* will, and his *Operative* will, your will, as well as God's will. And this is how you must come to contentment.

Sermon 2: The Art and Mystery of Contentment.

Here a Christian makes over his Will to God; and in making over his Will to God, he has no other Will except God's. Suppose I make over my debt to another man. If that man that I owe the debt to is satisfied and contented, I am satisfied, because I have made it over to him. I don't need to be discontented and say, "My debt isn't paid, and I am not satisfied." Yes, you *are* satisfied, for the one you made over your debt to, is satisfied. It is just this way, for all the world, between God and a Christian. A Christian heart makes over his will to God. Now then, if God's will is satisfied, then I am satisfied, for then I have no will of my own; it is melted into the will of God, for that is the excellency of grace. Grace not only subjects the will to God, but it melts the will into God's will, so that they are now but one will. What a sweet satisfaction the soul must have then in this condition, when all is made over to God.

You may say, This is hard! I will express it a little more: A gracious heart must have satisfaction this way, because godliness teaches him to see that his good is more in God than in himself. The good of my life, and my comforts, and my happiness, and my glory, and my riches, are more in God than in myself. (We may perhaps speak to this further, when we come to the Lessons that are to be learned.) But it is upon this, that a gracious heart has contentment: he melts his will into God's. For he says, "If God has glory, I have glory; God's glory is my glory, and therefore God's will is mine. If God has riches, then I have riches; if God is magnified, then I am magnified; if God is satisfied, then I am satisfied. God's wisdom and holiness are mine, and therefore His will must be mine, and my will needs to be His."

This is the Art of a Christian's Contentment: he melts his will into the will of God, and makes over his will to God: *O Lord, you shall choose our inheritance for us* (Psa 47.4).

7. The seventh thing in the Art of Contentment is this: *The Mystery doesn't consist so much in bringing in anything from outside to make my condition more comfortable, as it does in purging out something that is within.*

The men of the world now, when they would have contentment, and lack anything, O they must have something from without to content them. But a godly man says, Let me get something out that is already within me, and then I will come to contentment. Suppose a man has an ague, a shivering fever, that makes his drink taste bitter. Now he says, "You must put some sugar into my drink." His wife puts some in, and still the drink tastes bitter. Why? Because the bitterness comes from a bitter sickness within. But let the physician come and give him a bitter potion to purge out the bitterness that is within, and then he can taste his drink well enough. It is just this way with men of the world. O, such a condition is bitter, and if I could have such a mercy added to this mercy, then it would be sweet. Now, if God were to put in a spoonful or two of sugar, it would still be bitter. But the way to contentment is to purge out your lusts and bitter sickness.

Jas 4.1, *From where do wars and strifes come? Are they not from your lusts that are within you?* They are not so much from things without, but from within. As I have sometimes said, "It isn't all the storms that are abroad that can make the earth quake, but the vapors that have gotten within." And so, if those lusts that are within your heart were to be gotten out, your condition would be a contented condition. These are the mysterious ways of Godliness, that the men of the world never think of. When did you ever think of such a way as this, to go and purge out the diseases of your heart that are within you? Here seven particulars have been named; and there were a great many more that I had thought of. But without understanding these things, and practicing them, you will never come to true contentment in your way. Oh, then you would be bunglers in this trade of Christianity. But rightly perceiving these things will help you to be instructed in it, as in a Mystery.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

at Stepney, Thursday, Aug. 10, 1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

The Mystery of Contentment will appear further yet. A gracious heart gets contentment in a mysterious way, a way that the world is not acquainted with.

8. Eighthly, *a gracious heart lives upon the dew of God's Blessing.*

It is the analogy of one Adrian Junius,¹ likening a contented man to a *grasshopper*, leaping and skipping up and down, that lives upon the dew. And he has this motto, *I am content with what I have, and hope for better*. A grasshopper doesn't live on the grass as other things do; you cannot know what it feeds on. Other things, though as little as grasshoppers, feed upon seeds or little flies and such. But you don't know what the grasshopper feeds upon. So too, a Christian can get food that the world knows nothing of. In a secret way, a Christian is fed by the dew of the blessing of God. A poor man or woman who has but a little, yet who has grace, lives a more contented life than a rich neighbor who has a great deal coming in. We find it this way ordinarily, that even though they have but a little, they have a secret blessing of God in it, that they're not able to express to any other man. If you were to come to them and ask, How is it that you live so comfortably² as you do? they're not able to tell you what they have. But they find there is a sweetness in what they enjoy. And they know this by experience: that they never had such sweetness in former times. Even though they had a more plenty in former times than they have now, they know they didn't have such sweetness then. But how this comes about, they cannot tell. And we may show some particulars, even in what godly men enjoy, that makes their condition sweet.

For now, take these four or five particulars that a godly man finds contentment in, whatever he has, and however little.

(1.) *Because in whatever he has, he has the love of God to him*; he has God's love to him in what he has. If a king sent a piece of meat from his own table, it is a great deal more comforting to a courtier, than if he had twenty dishes as his ordinary allowance. If the king sends even a little thing, and says, Go and carry this to that man as a token of my love, Oh, how delightful that is to him! If your husbands are at sea, and they send you a token of their love, it is worth more than forty times as much as you have in your houses already. Every good thing the people of God enjoy, they enjoy it in God's love, as a token of God's love, and coming from God's eternal love to them. This must be very sweet to them.

(2.) *What they have is sanctified to them for good*. Other men have what they enjoy in a way of common providence; but the saints have it in a special way. Others have what they have, and that is all: they have food, drink, houses, clothes, and money; and that is all. But a gracious heart finds contentment in this. "I have it, and I have a sanctified use of it too. I find God along with what I have, to draw my heart nearer to Him, and sanctify my heart to Him. If I find my heart drawn nearer to God by what I enjoy, it is a great deal more than if I have it without my heart being sanctified by it. There is a secret dew that goes along with it — the dew of God's love in it, and the dew of sanctification.

(3.) *What a gracious heart has, he has it cost-free; he is not likely to be called to pay for what he has*. The difference between what a godly man has, and a wicked man has, is this: A godly man is like a child in an inn. An innkeeper has his child in the house, and this father provides

¹ Hadrianus Junius (1511–1575), or Adriaen de Jonghe — a Dutch physician, classical scholar, translator, lexicographer, antiquarian, historiographer, emblemist, school rector, and Latin poet.

² Comfortable doesn't mean material comforts; it means comforted in our heart and soul; without stress; at rest.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

the child's diet, and lodging, and whatever is fit for him. Now a stranger comes, and the stranger has dinner and supper provided, and lodging; but the stranger must pay for it all. It may be that the child's fare is simpler than the fare of the stranger — the stranger has it boiled and roasted and baked — but he must pay for it; there must come a reckoning for it. It is just so with many of God's people; they have only simple fare. But God provides it as a Father, and it is cost-free. They don't need to pay for what they have; it is paid for beforehand. But the wicked, in all their pomp, and pride, and finery — they have what they call for; but there must come a reckoning for it all. They must pay for it all at the conclusion. Isn't it better to have a little, cost-free, than to have to pay for it all? Grace shows a man that what he has, he has cost-free from God, as from a Father; and therefore, it must be very sweet.

(4.) Fourthly, a godly man may very well be content, even if he has only a little, *for what he has, he has it by right of Jesus Christ, by the purchase of Jesus Christ*. He has a right to it — another manner of right to what he has, than any wicked man can have. Wicked men have these outward things. I don't say they are usurpers of what they have; they do have a right to them, and that is a right before God. But how? It is a right by mere donation — that is, God gives it to them by His free bounty; but the right that the saints have, is a right of purchase. It is paid for, and it is their own. And they may in a holy manner, and holy way, claim whatever they need. We cannot express the difference between the right of a holy man, and the right of the wicked, more fully than by this analogy: a criminal is condemned to die; yet by a favor granted to him, he has his supper provided to him overnight. You cannot say — even though the criminal has forfeited all his rights to all things, to every bit of bread — that if he is *given* his supper, he *steals* it. This is true, even though he has forfeited all rights by his own fault. Once he has been condemned, he has no right to anything.

So it is with the wicked. They have forfeited all their rights to all the comforts in this world. They are condemned by God as criminals, and are going to their execution. But if God in His bounty gives them something to preserve them here in the world, they cannot be said to be thieves or robbers. But if a man is given a supper overnight before his execution, is that like the supper that he was used to having in his own house, when he ate his own bread, and had his wife and children about him? Oh, a dish of green herbs at home would be a great deal better than any delicacies in such a supper as that last one.

But now, a child of God doesn't have a right merely by donation. Rather, what he has is his own, through the purchase of Christ. Every bit of bread that you eat, if you are a godly man or woman, Jesus Christ has bought it for you. You go to market and buy your food and drink with your money. But know this: before you have bought it, or paid any money, Christ has bought it at the hand of God the Father, with his blood. You may have it at the hands of men for money, but Christ has bought it at the hand of his Father by his blood. And certainly, it is a great deal better and sweeter now, even if it is but a little.

(5.) Fifthly, there is another thing that shows the sweetness there is in the little that the Saints have, by which they come to have contentment, whereas others cannot. And that is, *Every little bit they have, is just an earnest penny¹ for all the glory that is reserved for them; it is given to them by God only as the forerunner of those eternal mercies that the Lord intends for them*. Now, if a man has only twelve pence² given to him as an earnest penny for some great possession that he must have, isn't that better than if he had forty pounds given to him otherwise? So too, every comfort that the saints have in this world is an earnest penny to them, for those eternal mercies that the Lord has provided for them. Just as every affliction that the wicked have here is but the beginning of sorrows, and a forerunner of those eternal sorrows they are likely to have

¹ A down payment, or a pledge that the rest will follow.

² There are one hundred pence in a British pound.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

hereafter in Hell, so every comfort *you* have is a forerunner of those eternal mercies you shall have with God in Heaven. Not only are the consolations of God's Spirit, the forerunners of those eternal comforts which you will have in Heaven, but when you sit at your table, and rejoice with your wife, and children, and friends, you may look upon every one of those as but a forerunner, yes, the very earnest penny of eternal life to you.

Now then, if this is so, it is no marvel that a Christian is contented (this is a mystery to the wicked). I have what I have out of the love of God; and I have it sanctified to me by God; and I have it cost-free from God by the purchase of the blood of Jesus Christ; and I have it as a forerunner of those eternal mercies that are reserved for me — and in this, my soul rejoices. There is a secret dew of God's goodness and blessing upon a Christian in his estate, that others don't have. By all this, you may see the meaning of that Scripture, *Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues without right* (Pro 16.8). A man who has but a little, if he has it with righteousness, it is better than a great deal without right; yes, better than *the great revenues of the wicked*, as you have it in another Scripture (Pro 15.6).

That is the next particular in *Christian Contentment* — and the Mystery is in this: that he lives upon the dew of God's blessing in all the good things that he enjoys.

9. The ninth thing in which the Mystery of Christian Contentment consists, is this: It is not only in the good things that he has, that a Christian has the dew of God's blessing (and they are very sweet to him). *But in all the afflictions, all the evils that befall him, he can see God's love in them all, and can enjoy the sweetness of love in his afflictions, as well as in his mercies.*

Indeed, the truth is, the afflictions of God's people come from the same eternal love that Jesus Christ came from. Take that saying of Jerome, *He is a happy man who is beaten, when the stroke is a stroke of love.* All God's strokes are strokes of love and mercy. *All God's ways are mercy and truth, to those who fear him and love him* (Psa 25.10).¹ The ways of God, the ways of affliction, as well as the ways of prosperity, are mercy and love to him. Grace gives a man an eye, a piercing eye, to pierce into the counsels of God, those eternal counsels of God for good to him, even in his afflictions — to see the love of God in every affliction as well as in prosperity. Now, this is a mystery to a carnal heart. They can see no such thing. Perhaps they think God loves them when He prospers them and makes them rich; but they think God doesn't loves them when He afflicts them; *that* is a Mystery to them. But grace instructs men in that Mystery. Grace enables men to see love in the very frowns of God's face. And so the Christian comes to receive contentment.

10. In the tenth place, a godly man has contentment in the way of a Mystery, *Because just as he sees all his afflictions come from the same love that Jesus Christ came from, so he sees them all sanctified in Jesus Christ, sanctified as a Mediator.*

He sees, I say, all the sting and venom and poison of them taken out by the virtue of Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man. For instance, when a Christian would have contentment, he starts working it out this way: What is my affliction? Is it poverty that God strikes me with? Jesus Christ didn't have a house to hide his head in. The fowls of the air had nests, and the foxes had holes, but the Son of man didn't have a hole to hide his head in. Now, *my* poverty is sanctified by *Christ's* poverty. I can see by faith, the curse and sting and venom of my poverty, taken out by the poverty of Jesus Christ.

Christ Jesus was poor in this world, to deliver me from the curse of my poverty, so that it wouldn't be cursed to me. So then, my poverty is not afflictive, if I can be contented in such a condition. That is the way — not to stand and repine because I don't have what others have, *no* — but to think, I am poor, and Christ was therefore poor, that he might bless my poverty to me.

¹ **Psa 25:10** All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

And so again, am I disgraced, dishonored? Is my good name taken away? Why, Jesus Christ had dishonor put upon him. He was called Beelzebub, and a Samaritan, and they said he had a devil in him. All the foul aspersions there could be, were cast upon Jesus Christ. And this was *for me*, that I might have the disgrace that is cast upon me, be *sanctified* to me. Whereas another man's heart is overwhelmed with dishonor and disgrace, and he works *another way* to get contentment. Perhaps if you are spoken ill of, you have no other way to ease and justify yourselves than this: if they rail upon you, you rail upon them in return; and by this you think to ease yourselves. Oh! but a Christian has another way to ease himself. "Others rail and speak ill of me, but didn't they rail upon Jesus Christ, and speak evil of him? And what am I in comparison to Christ? And the subjection of Christ to such an evil, was *for me*, that even if such a thing should come upon me, I might know that the curse of it is taken from me through Christ's subjection to that evil." Thus a Christian can be contented when anybody speaks ill of him.

Now, this is a Mystery to you, to get contentment in such a manner as this. So if men jeer and scoff at you, didn't they do so to Jesus Christ? They jeered and scoffed at him, and did it when he was in his greatest extremity on the Cross. They said, "Here's the King of the Jews," and they bowed the knee, and said, "Hail King of the Jews." They put a reed in his hand, and then mocked him (Mat 27.29). Now, I get contentment in the midst of scorns and jeers, by considering that Christ was scorned, and by acting faith ¹ upon that which Christ suffered for me. Am I in great pain in my body? Jesus Christ had pain in his body as great as I have. Though it is true that he didn't have the kind of sicknesses we have, yet he had pain and tortures in his body, as great and as deadly to him, as any sickness is to us. Exercising faith upon what Christ endured — *that* is the way to get contentment in the midst of our pains.

Say someone lies vexing and fretting himself, and cannot bear his pain. Are you a Christian? Have you ever tried this way of getting contentment: to act your faith on all the pains and sufferings that Jesus Christ suffered? This would be the way of contentment; and in this way, a Christian gets contentment when under pains. Sometimes one who is very godly and gracious, who lies under grievous pains and extremities very cheerfully, makes you wonder at it. This is the way he gets it: by acting his faith upon whatever pains Jesus Christ suffered. Are you afraid of death? The way to get contentment is by exercising your faith upon the death of Jesus Christ. Or maybe you have inward troubles in your soul, and God withdraws Himself from you. But still, your faith is to be exercised upon the sufferings that Jesus Christ endured in his soul. He poured out his soul before God when he sweat drops of water and blood. He was in agony in his very spirit (Luk 22.44). And he found that even God himself, in a way, forsook him (Mat 27.46). Now, acting your faith on Jesus Christ in this way, brings contentment. And isn't this a mystery to carnal hearts? A gracious heart finds contentment in a way of Mystery. It is no marvel then, if Paul says, *I am instructed in a mystery, to be contented in whatever condition I am in.*

In the eleventh place, there is yet a further Mystery. I hope you find this a very useful point, and that you see (before we're done) what a plain way there is to get contentment for someone who is skilled in religion — though it's hard for someone who is carnal. I say, the eleventh Mystery in Contentment is this:

11. *A gracious heart has contentment by fetching strength from Jesus Christ; he is able to bear his burden by fetching strength from another.*

Now, this is a riddle indeed. And it would be a ridiculous thing to be spoken of in the Schools of Philosophers, to say, If there is a burden upon you, you must fetch strength from another. Yes, to have another come and stand under the burden in your place — they would know *that way*. But to be strengthened by another's strength, who isn't near you, and not in your outward view — *that*

¹ That is, *exercising* faith by how we respond to people and circumstances. What is *believed* is put into *action*. It was a familiar phrase to Puritans, but seldom used today.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

they would think ridiculous. But a Christian finds satisfaction in every condition, by getting strength from another, by going out of himself to Jesus Christ — by acting his faith upon Christ; and bringing the strength of Jesus Christ into his own soul. Thereby he is enabled to bear whatever God lays upon him, by the strength that he finds from Jesus Christ. *Of his fullness we receive grace for grace* (Joh 1.16). There is strength in Christ, not only to sanctify and save us, but strength to support us under all our burdens and afflictions. And Christ expects that when we are under any burden, we would act our faith upon Him, to draw virtue and strength from him. *Faith* — that is the great grace that is to be acted under afflictions. It is true, other graces should be acted too. But the grace of *faith* draws strength from Christ, in looking to Him who has the fullness of all strength to be conveyed into the hearts of all believers.

Now, if a man has a burden on him, he can yet have strength added to him. Then if the burden is doubled, he can yet have his strength trebled. The burden won't be heavier, but lighter than it was before, under his natural strength alone. Indeed, our afflictions may be heavy, and we cry out, O we cannot bear them, we cannot bear such an affliction. Though you cannot tell how to bear it with your own strength, yet who can tell what you will do with the strength of Jesus Christ? You say you cannot bear it. Why? Do you think that Christ couldn't bear it? And if Christ could bear it, why may you not come to bear it? You may ask, "Can I have the strength of Christ?" Yes, that is made over to you by faith. So the Scripture says, *The Lord is our strength* (Jer 16.19). God himself is our strength, and Christ is our strength. We have a number of Scriptures saying this, that Christ's strength is yours, made over to you, so that you may be able to bear whatever lies upon you. And therefore we find such a strange kind of expression in Paul's epistle to the Colossians, praying for the saints (Col 1.11): That they might *be strengthened with all might according to his glorious power*. Unto what? *Unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness* — strengthened with all might, according to the power of God, the glorious power of God, unto all patience, and longsuffering with joyfulness. You are not, therefore, to be content with a *little* strength, so that you're able to bear what a man might bear by the mere strength of reason and nature. But you are to be strengthened with *all might*, according to the glorious power of God, unto all patience, and to all longsuffering.

Oh you who are now under very heavy and sad afflictions, more than ordinary. Look at this Scripture and consider how this Scripture is made good in you. Why may you not have this Scripture made good in you, if you are godly? You shouldn't be quiet in your own spirits, unless in some measure this Scripture is made good in you — so that you may with some comfort say, "Through God's mercy, I find that strength coming into me, which is spoken of in this Scripture." You should labor when you are under any great affliction (you who are godly) to walk this way, so that others may see such a Scripture made good in you. Here is the glorious power of God that strengthens his servants to all longsuffering, and does so with joyfulness. Alas, it may be that you don't exercise as much patience as a wise man or a wise woman, who has only *natural* reason. Where is the power of God, the glorious power of God? Where is the strengthening with all might, unto all longsuffering and patience, and doing so with joyfulness? It is true, the spirit of a man may be able to sustain his infirmities; it may be able to sustain and keep up his spirits — the *natural* spirit of a man. But much more then, when this spirit is acted with grace and holiness, and when it is filled with the strength of Jesus Christ.

This is the way a godly man gets contentment; this is the Mystery of it. It is by fetching strength from Jesus Christ.

12. Twelfthly, another Mystery that is in contentment, is this: *A godly heart enjoys much of God in everything he has, and knows how to make up all wants, in God himself.*

That is another mystery: he has God in what he has,. I spoke somewhat about that before, in showing the dew of God's blessing in what he has. For God is able to set out a great deal of His power in little things; and therefore the miracles that God has wrought, have been as much in

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

little things as in great. Now, just as God sets out a great deal of his power in working miracles in smaller things, so He sets out a great deal of goodness and mercy in comforting and rejoicing the hearts of His people, in little things as well as great. There may be as much riches in a pearl, as in a great deal of lumber; but this is very a distinct thing.

Further, because a gracious heart lives upon God's dew in the little that he has, when that little is taken from him, what will he do then? Then you say, If a man has nothing, there can be nothing fetched out of nothing. But if the children of God have their little taken from them, they can make up all their wants, in God himself. Say a man is a poor man; plunderers came and took away all that he had. What will he do, then, when all is gone? But when all is gone, there is an art and skill that godliness teaches, to make up all those losses, in God. Many men who have their houses burnt, go about gathering, and so they get up a little by many hands. But a godly man knows where to go to get it *all* up, even in God himself, so that he may enjoy the quintessence of the same good and comfort as he had before. For a godly man doesn't live so much in himself, as he lives in God. Now, this is a mystery to a carnal heart. I say a gracious man doesn't live so much in himself as in God; he lives in God *continually*. If anything is cut off from the stream, he knows how to go to the Fountain, and he makes it all up there. God is his all in all, while he lives. I say it is *God* who is his all in all. *Am I not to you*, says Elkanah to Hannah, *better than ten children?* So says God to a gracious heart: You lack this; your estate is plundered. Why, am not I better to you than ten homes, and ten shops? I am to you *instead of All*; and not only *instead of All*, but come to me, and *you will have All again in me*. This indeed is an excellent art, to be able to draw from *God* what it had before in the *creature*.¹

Christian, how did you enjoy comfort before? Was the creature anything to you other than a conduit, a pipe, that conveyed God's goodness to you? The pipe is cut off, says God. Come to me, the Fountain, and drink directly. Though the beams are taken away, yet the Sun remains the same as ever in the firmament. What is it that satisfies God himself, if not that He enjoys all fullness in himself? Thus he comes to have satisfaction in Himself. Now, if you enjoy God as your portion, if your soul can say with the Church in Lam 3.24: *The Lord is my portion, says my soul*, then why shouldn't you be satisfied and contented like God? God is contented; He is in eternal contentment in himself. Now, if you would have God as your portion, why shouldn't you be contented with him alone? God is contented with Himself alone. If you have him, you may be contented with him alone. And it may be, *that* is the reason why your outward comforts are taken from you, so that God may be All in All to you.

It may be that while you had these things here, they had a share with God in your affection. A great part of the stream of your affection ran that way. Now God would have the full stream run to Him. As you know it is with a man who has water come to his house, and if there are several pipes, and he finds water comes only scantily into his washhouse, he would rather stop the other pipes so that he may have all the water come in where he would have it. So here, it may be that God had some stream of your affection that ran to him when you enjoyed these things; yes, but a great deal was let out to the creature, a great deal of your affections were wasted. Now, the Lord would not have the affections of his children wasted. He doesn't care for other men's affections; but *yours* are precious, and God would not have them wasted. Therefore, he has cut off your other pipes, so that your heart might run wholly upon Him.

It is as if you have children, and because your servants perhaps feed them, and give them things, you perceive that your servants steal away the hearts of your children. You would hardly be able to bear it. You would be ready to turn away such a servant; and when the servant is gone, the child is at a great loss. It doesn't have the nurse. But what the father or mother intends by putting her away, is that the affections of the child might run more strongly towards him or her. And what

¹ *Creature*: any created thing or being. Material possessions are "creature comforts." It can also refer to *us* as creatures, distinguishing our bodily senses and needs, from our spiritual nature.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

loss does the child have, in that the affections which before ran in a rough channel towards the servant, now run towards the mother? So those affections that run towards the creature, God would have them run towards himself, so that He may be All in All to you here in this world.

And a gracious heart can indeed tell how to enjoy God, as All in All to him. That is the happiness of heaven, to have God to be All in All. The saints in heaven don't have houses, and lands, and money, and food, and drink, and clothes. You may say, they don't need them. Why not? It is because God is All in All to them directly. Now, while you live in this world, you may come to enjoy much of God; you may have much of heaven. While we live in this life, we may come to enjoy much of the very life that is in heaven. And what is that, if not the enjoyment of God as All in All to us? There is one text in the Revelation, that speaks of the glorious condition of the Church that is likely to be here, even in this world: *And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple, and the city had no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God enlightened it, and the Lamb is its light* (Rev 21.22-23).

They had no need of the sun or moon. It speaks of such a glorious condition that the Church is likely to be in, here in this world. This doesn't speak of heaven, but of the glorious estate that the Church will be in *here*, in this world. And that appears plainly, for it follows immediately in the 24th and 26th verses, *And the Kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it*. Why, the Kings of the earth won't bring their glory and honor into heaven. But this is a time when the Kings of the earth will bring their glory and honor *to the Church*. And in the 26th verse, *And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it*. Therefore, it must mean here in this world, and not in heaven. Now, if there is such a time here in this world, that God shall be All in All, that in comparison there will be no need of such creatures as there is now, then the saints should labor to live as near that life as they possibly can; that is, to make up all *in God*.

Oh that you would but mind this mystery, that it may be a reality to the hearts of the saints in such times as these. They would find this privilege that they get by grace, worth thousands of worlds. Hence is that statement of Jacob that I mentioned in another case; it is remarkable, and it comes in fully here, in Genesis 33. It is that notable speech of Jacob when his brother Esau met him. You find in one place, verse 8, that Esau refused Jacob's present when Jacob gave it to him. He refused it, and told Jacob that he had enough: *What do you mean by all this drove which I met?* And Jacob said, *These are to find grace in your sight*. And Esau said, *I have enough*. Then in the 11th verse, Jacob still urges it, and says, *I beseech you, take it, for I have enough*. Now, in your Bible it is the same in English. *I have enough*, says Esau; and *I have enough*, says Jacob. But in the *Hebrew*, Jacob's word is different from Esau's. Jacob's word signifies *I have all things*, and yet Jacob was poorer than Esau. Oh we should think this a shame, that an Esau should say, *I have enough*. But now a Christian should say, I have not only enough, but *I have all*. How did he have all? Because he has *God*, who is All. It was a notable saying of someone, *He has all things, who has Him that has all things*. Surely you have all things, because you have Him *for your portion*, who has all things. God has all things in himself; and you have God as yours, for your portion. And in *that*, you have all. And this is the Mystery of Contentment. It makes up all wants, *in God*. This is what the men of the world have little skill in.

Now I have a number of other things to open in the Mystery of Contentment. I should likewise show that a godly man not only makes up all in God, but finds enough *in himself* to make up all, to make up all *in himself* — not *from* himself, but *in* himself. And that may seem to be even stranger than the other — to make up all in God is somewhat strange; but indeed stranger, to make up all in himself — not from himself, but in himself. That is, a gracious heart has so much of God *within* himself, that he has enough there to make up all his wants that are *without*.

In Pro 14.14 we read, *A good man shall be satisfied from himself*, from that which is within himself — that's the meaning. A gracious man has a bird within his own bosom which makes melody enough for him, though he lacks music. *The Kingdom of heaven is within you* (Luk 17.21). He has

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

a Kingdom within him, and a Kingdom of God. You see him spoken ill of abroad; but he has a conscience within him that makes up for the lack of a name and credit, and that takes the place of a thousand witnesses.

13. *A gracious heart fetches contentment from the Covenant that God has made with him.*

Now this is a way of getting contentment, that the men of the world don't know of. They can fetch contentment if they have the creature to satisfy them; but to fetch contentment from the Covenant of Grace — they have little skill in that. I should have opened two things here.

First, how to get contentment from the Covenant of Grace in general. (But I'll speak to that in the next sermon; for now, only a word as to the second).

Secondly, how he gets contentment from the particular branches of the Covenant; that is, from the particular Promise that he has, for supplying each particular want.

There is no condition that a godly man or woman can be in, that there isn't some promise or other in the Scripture to help him in that condition. And that is the way of his contentment, to go out to the Promises, and get from the Promise, that which may supply the want. This is but a dry business to a carnal heart; but it's the most real thing in the world to a gracious heart. When he finds lack of contentment, he repairs to the Promise and the Covenant, and falls to pleading the promises that God has made. I might have shown several Promises that God has made, whatever the affliction; but I will mention only one. And it's the saddest affliction of all in case of the Visitation, and the Plague — those whose friends cannot come to them now because of the plague, and who cannot have other comforts. In other afflictions, they might have their friends and other things to comfort them — but in this they cannot. We read, *No evil shall befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling* (Psa 91.10); then in the 5th and 6th verses, there is a promise for the pestilence. This is a Scripture for those who are in danger of it. You may say that this is a promise that the plague shall not come near them. But mark that these two things are joined: *no evil shall befall you, neither shall the plague come near you — the evil of it shall not come near you.*

Objection: You may say, but it *does* come to many godly men. So how can they make use of this Scripture? It is a Scripture that instead may trouble them, because here is a promise that it won't come near them, and yet it *does* come near them, as well as others.

Answer:

1. The promises of outward deliverances that were made to the people of God in the time of the Law, were *then* to be understood a great deal more literally, and fulfilled more literally, than in the times of the gospel, when God makes it up another way, but with as much mercy. Though God made a Covenant of grace and eternal life in Christ with them, yet I think there was another covenant too. God speaks of it as a distinct covenant for *outward things*, to deal with His people according to their ways, either in outward prosperity, or in outward afflictions, more so then than now. He did so in a more punctual, set way, than in the times of the gospel. Therefore, when the children of Israel sinned against God, they were sure to have *public judgments* come upon them; and if they did well, always *public mercies*. The general, constant way of God was to deal with the people of the Jews as they did well or ill, with outward judgments and outward mercies. But it is not so now, in these times of the gospel. We *cannot* bring such a certain conclusion, that if God dealt so severely with men by such and such afflictions, that He will deal so with them now — that they will have outward prosperity as they had then. So, that's the first thing for understanding this, and all other texts of that kind.¹

¹ Burroughs points out that Israel, as a nation, was called "My people Israel." Not so for any other nation under the Gospel. For God now calls His people from *every* tribe, and tongue, and nation. Therefore, contrary to popular lore, there are no Christian nations, only nations filled with Christians, who are a blessing to their nation. — WHG

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

2. Perhaps their faith doesn't reach to this promise. God often brings many outward afflictions, because the faith of his people doesn't reach the promise, and that is so not only in the Old Testament, but in the times of the New Testament. Zacharias' time may be said to be in the time of the New Testament, when he was struck dumb because he didn't believe; and that is given to be the cause why he was struck dumb. But you may ask now, Does faith have a warrant to believe for deliverance, that it will be fully delivered? I dare not say so; but faith may act upon it, to believe that God will make it good *in His own way*. Perhaps you haven't done as much; and so upon that, this promise is not fulfilled for you.¹

3. When God does make such promises to His people, it must still be with this reservation, that God must have liberty for these three things.

(1.) That despite his promise, He has liberty to make use of anything for your chastisement.

(2.) That He must have liberty to make use of your estates, or liberties, or lives, to further his own ends. If it is to be a stumbling block to wicked and ungodly men, God must have liberty. Even though He has made a promise to you, He will not lose the proprietorship that He has in your estates and lives.

(3.) God must have enough liberty to make use of what you have, to show that His ways are unsearchable, and His judgments past finding out (Rom 11.33).

God reserves these three things in his hand still.

Objection. But you may say, *Then what good is there in such a promise that God makes to his people?*

Answer. That you are under the protection of God more than others are.

Objection. *But what comfort is that if it befalls me?*

Answer. You have *this* comfort, that the evil of it will be taken from you; and that if God makes use of this affliction for other ends, he will do it so as to make it up to you in some other way. Perhaps you have given your children something, but afterwards, if you have a use for that thing, you come to them and say, I must have it. "Why, father?" the child may ask, "You gave it to me." "But I must have it," says the father, "and I will make it up to you some other way." Now, the child doesn't think that the father's love for him is ever a whit less. So too, when there is any such promise as this, that by his promise God gives you his protection, and yet for all that, such a thing befalls you, it's as if the Father had said, "I gave you that, indeed; but let me have it, and I'll make it up to you some other way that will be as good." God says, "Let me have your health, and liberty, and life, and it will be made up to you in some other way."

Secondly, whenever the plague or pestilence comes to those who are under such a promise, it is for some special and notable work. And so God requires them to search and examine it in a special manner, to find out His meaning. There is so much to be learned in the promise that God has made concerning this particular evil, that the people of God may come to quiet and content their hearts in this affliction. I read in Psalm 91 that God has made a Promise to his people, to deliver them from the plague and pestilence, and yet I find it has come. It may be that I haven't made use of my faith in this Promise before now. And if God does bring afflictions upon me, yet He will make it up in some other way. God made a promise to deliver me from it, or at least to deliver me from all the *evil* of it. Now if this thing does befall me, and yet I have a promise of God, then certainly the evil of it is taken away. This promise tells me that if it does befall me, yet it is for some notable end, and because God has a use for my life, and He intends to bring about his glory

¹ **Mar 9:24** "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" Either we don't believe deliverance is possible, and so we don't "reach the Promise;" or else we insist it be done *in our way*, and not "in His own way" — and so it isn't fulfilled for us.

Sermon 3: The Art and Mystery of Contentment (cont'd).

in some way that I know nothing of. And if He comes in a fatherly way of chastisement, I will still be satisfied in the thing.

Thus a Christian heart, by reasoning out of the Word, comes to satisfy his soul in the midst of such a heavy hand of God, and in such a distressed condition as this. Now carnal hearts, they don't find that power in the Word — the healing virtue that there is in the Word, to heal their disquieting cares, and the troubles of their spirits. But those who are godly, when *they* come to hear the Word, they find out that in the Word, there is a sort of bandage for all their wounds. And so they come to have ease and contentment in those conditions which are very grievous and miserable to others.

But now, for other particular promises, and more generally for the Covenant of Grace — how and in what mysterious way the saints work to fetch contentment and satisfaction for their souls — we will refer that to the next time.

Sermon 4: The Lessons of Contentment.

at Stepney, Thursday, Aug. 17.1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

In the last exercise, we spoke of various things in the Mystery of Contentment. And at the close, we spoke of two more, but we didn't have time to open either of them. I will open them a little more largely, and then proceed to a few more, and so to other things in the point.

That is the next then. ¹ A Christian heart not only has contentment in God — and certainly, whoever has God, must have all, for he has Him who has all. But,

14. *He is able to make up all his outward lack of creature-comforts from what he finds in himself.*

That may seem strange. It is true, perhaps, that even though men don't feel by experience what it means to make up all *in God*, yet we may convince them that if they have Him who has all things, then they have all. For there is such a fullness in God — He being the infinite First-being of all things — that He may make up all their wants. But here's another, a further thing. I say, A godly man can make up whatever he lacks without the creature; he can make it up in himself. In Pro 14.14 we read: *A good man will be satisfied from himself.*² If he now lacks outward comforts, good cheer, feasting — then a good conscience is a continual feast. He can make up the lack of a feast by the peace that he has in his own conscience. If he lacks melody abroad, he has a bird within him that sings the most melodious songs in the world, and the most delightful. And then, does he lack honor? He has his own conscience witnessing for him, and that is like a thousand witnesses.

The Scripture says in Luk 17.21, *Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, Lo there! for the kingdom of God is within you.* A Christian, then, whatever he lacks, he can make it up; for he has a kingdom in himself — the Kingdom of God is within him. If one who is a king meets with a great deal of trouble when he is abroad, yet he contents himself with this: I have a Kingdom of my own. Now, here it is said, the Kingdom of God is within a man. Truly, upon this Scripture of the Kingdom of God being *within*, those who are learned, if they would but look at that comment on the Gospel that we have from a learned man,³ they will find a very strange concept that he has about this very text. He confesses, indeed, that it is unutterable; and so indeed it is: *The kingdom of God is within you.* He makes it out that there is such a presence of God and Christ within the soul of a man, that when the body dies (he says), the soul goes into God, and Christ who is within him. The soul's going into God and Christ, and enjoying that communion with God and Christ that is within itself, that's Heaven to the soul (he says).

He confesses that he's not able to express himself, nor are others able to fully understand what he intends. But certainly for the present, before death, there is a Kingdom of God within the soul. And it is such a manifestation of God in the soul, that it is enough to content the heart of any godly man in the world. The Kingdom that he now has within him, he need not wait for till afterwards, till he goes to Heaven — but certainly there is a Heaven in the soul of a godly man; he has Heaven already. Many times when you go to comfort your friends in their afflictions, you say, "Heaven will pay for all." But indeed, you may certainly find that Heaven pays for all, already. There is a

¹ Burroughs began this sermon by expanding on two things said at the end of the previous sermon. He now continues his list of Mysteries. In the previous sermon he left off at "thirteenth." But he didn't continue to number them in this sermon. Numbers are provided to help the reader identify and group them. — WHG

² Burroughs uses the KJV for Pro 14:14. The NKJ says, "a good man *will be satisfied* from above." The NAS, "a good man will *be satisfied* with his." An English translation of the LXX is, "A stout-hearted *man* shall be filled with his own ways; and a good man with his own thoughts." These suggest that Hebrew is more suggestive than explicit. — WHG

³ The commentator is unknown. Many translations favor "among you," not "within you." But whether individually or corporately (as the Church), the Kingdom of Heaven is a present reality for us, not just a future hope. — WHG

Sermon 4: The Lessons of Contentment.

Heaven within the souls of the Saints — that's a certain truth. No soul will ever come to Heaven, if Heaven doesn't first come to that soul. When you die, you hope you will go to Heaven; but if you go to Heaven when you die, Heaven will come to you *before* you die.

Now, this is a great mystery, to have the Kingdom of Heaven in the soul. No man can know this except that soul which has it. That Heaven which is within the soul for the present (I say), is like the White Stone and the New Name — none but those who have it can understand it. It's a miserable condition, my brethren, to depend entirely upon creatures for our contentment. You know that rich men count it a great happiness if they don't need to buy things "by the penny" as others do.¹ They have all things for pleasure or profit on their own ground, and all their inheritance lies together in its entirety. They have nobody coming within their boundaries,² but they have everything within themselves; and their happiness lies in this. Whereas other poorer people are prepared to go from one market to another to provide themselves with necessities, great rich men have sheep and cattle, corn and clothing, and all other things of their own, within themselves; and they place their happiness in this.

But this is the happiness of a Christian: that he has within himself that which may satisfy him more than all these. That place in the first chapter of James, seems to allude to that condition of men who have all their estates within themselves. Jas 1.4, *But let patience have her perfect work that we may be perfect, and entire, lacking nothing.* The word used there signifies to have the whole inheritance to ourselves; not a broken inheritance, but one where all lies within ourselves. It's like a man who doesn't have a piece of his estate here, and a piece there, but has it all lying together. And the heart, being patient under afflictions, finds itself in such an estate as this. He finds his whole inheritance to be together, and entire within itself.

And now to show this still further by a few analogies. With a Christian, being filled with good things is like many a man who enjoys an abundance of comforts at home, at his own house. God grants him a convenient habitation, a comforting yokefellow (a spouse), fine walks and gardens, and he has all the things at home he could desire. Now, this man doesn't care much for going abroad. Other men are glad to go abroad and take the air; but he has a sweet air at home. And they are glad to go abroad to see friends, because they have squabbling and contentions at home. Many bad husbands will use their bad husbandry as an excuse to go abroad, because they can never find quiet at home (their wife moans and complains of his bad husbandry). Now, we count those men most happy who have all they want at home. Those who have small houses that are unsavory, and smell bad, delight to go into the fresh air; but it is not so with many others who have these at home. Those who have no good cheer at home, are glad to go abroad to friends; but those who have their tables furnished, would as soon stay at home.

Similarly, a carnal man has but little contentment in his own spirit. It's Augustine's analogy that a bad conscience is like a scolding wife: a man who has a bad conscience doesn't care to look into his own soul. He loves to be abroad and looks into other things, but never into himself. But one who has a good conscience, delights in looking into his own heart; he has a good conscience within him. And so a carnal heart, because there's nothing but filthiness — a filthy stink in himself, and nothing but vileness and baseness within him — he thereupon seeks his contentment elsewhere.

A vessel full of liquor, if you strike it, makes no great noise; but if it's empty, it makes a great noise. So it is with the heart. A heart that is full of grace and goodness within, will take a great many strokes and never make a noise. But an empty heart, if that is struck it *will* make a noise. Those men and women who complain so much, and are always whining, it is a sign that there is an

¹ That is, they don't have to worry about the price; they can buy it by the case, instead of by the piece.

² The image is having to sublet an estate, allow crop-sharers, or take in borders to cover the bills.

Sermon 4: The Lessons of Contentment.

emptiness in their hearts. But if their hearts were filled with grace, they wouldn't make such a noise as they do now.

A man whose bones are filled with marrow, and veins with good blood, doesn't complain about the cold as others do. So a gracious heart, having the Spirit of God within him, and his heart filled with grace, has within him what makes him find contentment. It was a saying of Seneca, "Indeed, those things that I suffer will be incredibly heavy when I cannot bear even myself. But if I am no burden to myself, if all is quiet within my own heart, then I can bear anything." Through their wickedness, many men have burdens without; but the greatest burden is the wickedness of their own hearts. They are not burdened with their sins in a godly way — *that* would ease their burden. But they still have their wickedness in all its power, and so they are burdens to themselves. The distempers of men's hearts are mighty burdens to them. But many times a godly man has enough *within* to content him. "Virtue is content with itself, for living well." This is a saying of Cicero in one of his *Paradoxes*.¹ It finds enough within its own sphere for living happily. But how few are acquainted with this mystery!

Many think, O if I had what another man has, how happily and comfortably I would live! Oh but if you're a Christian, whatever your condition may be, you have enough within yourself. You might say that such and such men who have all things, needn't be beholden to anybody. You have many who labor and take pains when they are young, so that they might not be beholden to others; they love to live by themselves. Now, a Christian may do so — not that he doesn't live upon God (I don't mean that), but upon what he has of God *within* himself. He can live upon that, even if he doesn't enjoy the comforts that are *without* himself. *That's* what I mean. And those who are godly, and keep close to God in their communion with Him, understand what I mean by saying that a Christian has a supply of all his wants within himself. And here you may see that the spirit of a Christian is a precious spirit; a godly spirit is precious. Why? Because it has enough to make him happy within himself.

The next thing that the Mystery of Contentment consists in is this,

15. *A gracious heart fetches its supply of everything from the Covenant, and so he comes to have contentment.* This is a dry thing to a carnal spirit. Now, there are two things in this:

- (1.) He fetches contentment from the Covenant in general; that is, from the great Covenant that God has made with him in Christ.
- (2.) He fetches contentment from the particular promises that God has made with him in the Covenant.

(1.) From the Covenant in general. I'll give you one Scripture for that; it is very remarkable:

2Sam 23.5, *Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, even if He doesn't make it grow.*

It is a most admirable Scripture of David, who didn't yet have the Covenant of Grace opened as fully as we have. Mark what David says: *Although I don't find my house so*, that is, so comfortable in every way as I would have it. Although it isn't so, what does he have to content his spirit? He says, *He has made with me an everlasting covenant.* This is what helps it all. I am not (may some men say) thus and thus with God; I don't find God has come in so fully, and it is not with my house and family as I hoped it might be; perhaps there is this or that affliction upon my house; suppose you had the plague come into your house, and your house isn't safe; and you don't have that outward comfort in your house that you had formerly. But you can read this Scripture and say,

¹ *Stoic Paradoxes*, c. 46 BC, written by Cicero (106-43 BC), a Roman statesman, lawyer, academic, and philosopher. He attempts to explain six famous Stoic sayings that appear to go against common understanding.

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“Although my house is not so blessed with health as other men’s houses are, although my house isn’t so, yet He has made with me an everlasting Covenant. I am still in covenant with God. The Lord has made with me an *everlasting* covenant. As for these things in the world, I see they are but momentary, they are not everlasting. I see this in a family, when all was well but a week ago, and now all is down, and the Plague has swept away a great many of them, and the rest are left in sadness and mourning. We see there is no resting in the things of this world; and yet the Lord has made with me an everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things. I find disorder in my heart, in my family; but the everlasting covenant — *that* is ordered in all things, yes, and that is sure.

Alas, there is no sureness here in these things. I can be sure of nothing here, especially in these times. We know that a man can be sure of little that he has; who can be sure of his estate? Perhaps some of you here have lived well and comfortably before, and all was well about you, and you thought your mountain was strong. But within a day or two, all is taken away from you. So that, there is no sureness in the things of this world; but David says, the *Covenant* is sure. What I risk at sea isn’t sure. But here is an Assurance Office, indeed. Here is a great Assurance Office for the saints; and they are not charged, except to exercise grace. For they may go to this Assurance Office to assure everything they risk, either to have the thing itself, or to be paid for it. In an Assurance Office you cannot be assured to have the very goods come in that you insured; but if they are lost, the insurers engage themselves to make it good to you. And this Covenant of grace that God has made with his people, is God’s Assurance Office. The saints in all their fears may, and ought to go to the Covenant to assure all things to them — to assure their estates, and assure their lives.

You may ask, How are they sure their lives and estates go as well as others? But God pledges himself to make up all. And then mark what follows, *This is all my salvation*. Why David? Won’t you have salvation from your enemies and outward dangers, from pestilence and plague? The frame of his spirit is quieted, as if to say, “If that salvation comes, well and good. I will praise God for it. But what I have in the Covenant, *that’s* my salvation, I look upon that as enough.” Yes, and then further, *This is all my salvation and all my desire*. Why David? Isn’t there something else you would have besides this Covenant? No, he says, it is all involved in this. Surely those men or women must live contented lives, who have all their desires. Now, the holy man says here, *This is all my desire, even if he doesn’t make it grow*. But for all this Covenant, perhaps you still won’t prosper in the world as other men do. True, but I am at a point for that. Though God doesn’t make my house grow, I have all my desires.

Thus you see how a godly heart finds contentment in the Covenant. Many of you speak of the Covenant of God, and of the Covenant of Grace; but have you found it so effectual to your souls? Have you sucked this sweetness from the Covenant, to content your hearts in your sad conditions? It is a special sign of the truth of grace in any soul, that when any affliction befalls him, in a kind of natural way he quickly repairs to the Covenant. As with a child, as soon as it is in danger, you don’t need to tell him, “When you’re in danger, you must go to your father or mother.” Nature tells him so. And thus it is with a gracious heart: as soon as it is in any trouble or affliction, there is a new nature which carries him to the Covenant quickly. And there it finds ease and rest. If you find that your hearts work in this way, immediately running to the Covenant, it is an excellent sign of the truth of grace. That is for the *general* aspect.

(2.) Now for *particular* Promises in the Covenant of Grace. A gracious heart looks upon every promise as coming from the Root of the great Covenant of Grace in Christ. Other men look upon some particular promises — that God will help them in straits, and keep them, and the like. But they don’t look at the connection of such particular promises to the Root, to the Covenant of Grace. Christians miss a great deal of comfort they might have from the particular promises in the Gospel, if they don’t look at their connection to the Root, the great Covenant that God has made with them in Christ. Now, I remember I spoke a little about that — that in outward promises in the time of the Law, they might rest more upon them than we can in the time of the Gospel. I gave

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you the reason why we who live in the time of the Gospel, cannot rest so fully on the literal performance of outward promises that we encounter in the Old Testament, as they might who lived in the time of the Law. For there was a special covenant that God was pleased to call a *New Covenant*, to distinguish it from the other covenant; it was made with us in Christ for eternal life. And so, even the Law was given to them in a more peculiar way, as an external covenant of outward blessings in the land of Canaan. And so God dealt with them in a more external covenant than He does now with his people. Yet godliness has the promise of this life, and of that life which is to come. We may make use of the promises for this life, yet not rest upon their literal performance so much as those of old might. And yet God will make them good in some way or other — in a *spiritual* way, if not in an *outward* way. We must lay no more upon outward promises than this. Therefore, if we would lay more, we make the promise to bear more than it will bear out.

To give some instance: to believe fully and confidently that the plague will not come near a certain house, I say, is to lay more upon such a promise than it will bear. If you remember, I opened that promise in Psalm 91. Now, if I had lived in the time of the Law, perhaps I might have been somewhat more confident of the literal performance of the promise, than I can be now in the time of the Gospel. The promise now bears no more than this: that God has a special protection over His people, and that He will deliver them from the *evil* of such an affliction. If providence does bring such an affliction, it is more than an ordinary providence; it is a *special* providence that God has in it. I thought I would give you a number of promises for the contentment of the heart in times of affliction:

Isa 43.2, *When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.* Certainly, though this promise was made in the time of the Law, it will be made good to all the saints now, one way or another, either in the letter (literally), or some other way.

For so we find it plainly that the promise made to Joshua, in Jos 1.5, *I will not fail you nor forsake you*, is applied to Christians in the time of the Gospel (Heb 13.5).

So here is the way of Faith: in bringing contentment by the promises, the Saints of God have an interest in all the promises that were ever made to our forefathers, from the beginning of the world. They are their inheritance, and go on from one generation to another. And by *that*, they come to have contentment, because they inherit all the promises made in all the books of God.

Heb 13.5 shows plainly that it is our inheritance. And we do not inherit *less* now than they did in Joshua's time; rather, we inherit *more*. For you find in that passage in Hebrews, that more is said than is said to Joshua. God says to Joshua, He will not leave him nor forsake him. But in Hebrews, there are five negatives in the Greek — I will not, not, not, not, and not again. That is the force of it in the Greek. I say, there are five negatives in that little sentence; as if God had said, I will not leave you, no I will not, I will not, I will not, with such earnestness, five times together.¹ So that we not only have the same promises *they* had, but we have them more enlarged and fuller, though still not so much in the literal sense; for that, indeed is the *least* part of the promise.

Isa 54.17. God made a promise there that *No weapon formed against his people should prosper, and every tongue that rises against them in judgment, You shall condemn.* Mark what follows, *This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me*, says the Lord. This is a good promise for a soldier; though *still*, don't lay too much upon the literal sense. True, it holds forth this much, that God's protection is in special manner over the soldiers who are godly. And *every tongue that rises against you in judgment, You shall condemn* — this is against false witness too. Oh you, whose friends never left you anything! You should say, "My friends died and

¹ **Heb 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."* The quote from the OT, says literally in Greek, "No not you leave, and not, no not you forsake" — as Burroughs emphasized.

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didn't leave me a groat.¹ But I thank God, *He* has provided for me." Though your father or mother died and left you no heritage, yet you have a heritage in the promise. *This is the heritage*. So that, there is no godly man or woman who is not a great heir.

Therefore, when you look into the book of God, and find any promise there, you may make that your own. Just as an heir who rides over a number of fields and meadows may say, "This meadow is my inheritance, and this corn field is my inheritance." And then he sees a fair house, and he says, "This fair house is my inheritance." He looks at them with a different eye than a stranger who rides over those fields. Thus a carnal heart reads the promises merely as stories, not that he has any great interest in them. But every time a godly man reads the Scriptures (remember this Note when you are reading the Scripture) and meets with a promise, he ought to lay his hand upon it and say, "This is part of my inheritance. It is mine, and I am to live upon it." This will make you contented. Here is a Mysterious way of Contentment. See Psa 34.10, and 37.6. There are various other promises that bring contentment, as in Isa 58.10.² And this much for the Mystery of Contentment by way of the Covenant.

There are two or three more things that show how a godly man has contentment in another kind of way than any carnal heart in the world has. It is a Mysterious way, such as these:

16. *He has contentment by realizing the glorious things of heaven to him.*

He has the kingdom of Heaven as *present*, and the glory that is *to come*, he makes it as present by faith. So the martyrs had contentment in their sufferings. For some of them said, Though we have but a hard breakfast, yet we shall have a good dinner, we shall very soon be in heaven. "Do but shut your eyes," said one, "and you shall be in heaven at once." *We don't faint*, says the Apostle (2Cor 4.16). Why? *Because these light afflictions that are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. They see heaven before them, and that contents them. You mariners, when you can see the haven before you, even though you were mightily troubled before you could see any land, when you come near the shore and can see a landmark, that contents you exceedingly. A godly man in the midst of the waves and storms that he meets with, can see the glory of heaven before him, and so he contents himself. One drop of the sweetness of heaven is enough to take away all the sour and bitter of all the afflictions in the world. Indeed, here we know that one drop of sour, or one drop of gall, will make bitter a great deal of honey. Put a spoonful of sugar into a cup of gall or wormwood, and that will not sweeten it. But if you put a spoonful of gall into a cup of sugar, it will embitter that. It is otherwise in heaven: one drop of sweet will sweeten a great deal of sour affliction; but a great deal of sour and gall will not embitter a soul who sees the glory of Heaven to come. Now, a carnal heart has no contentment except from what he sees before him in this world; but a godly heart has contentment from what he sees laid up for him in the highest heavens.

17. *The last thing that I would mention is this, A godly man has contentment by opening and letting out his heart to God.*

Other men or women are discontented, but how do they help themselves? By railing, by bad language. Someone crosses them, and they have no way to help themselves except by railing and by bitter words, and so they ease themselves that way when they are angry. But when a godly man is crossed, how does he ease himself? He is sensible of his cross as well as you, but he goes to God in prayer, and there he opens his heart to God, and lets out his sorrows and fears; and then he can come away with a joyful countenance. Now, do *you* find that you can come away from prayer and

¹ *Groat*: A former English silver coin worth four pennies.

² **Psa 34:10** The young lions lack and suffer hunger; But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good *thing*. **Psa 37:6** He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. **Isa 58:10** If you extend your soul to the hungry And satisfy the afflicted soul, Then your light shall dawn in the darkness, And your darkness shall *be* as the noonday.

not look sad? It is said of Hannah, 1Sam 1.18, that when *she* had been at prayer, her countenance was no longer sad; there she was comforted. This is the right way to contentment.

Thus we are done with the Mystery of Contentment. Now, if you can but put together these things that we have spoken of, you may see fully what an art Christian contentment is. Paul needed to *learn* it. You see that contentment is not such a poor business as many make it out to be, saying, *You must be content*, etc. But it is a great Art and Mystery of godliness to be contented in the way of a Christian. And it will be appear still further to be a Mystery, when we come to show the Third Head — and that’s to show what those lessons are that a gracious heart learns when it comes to be contented.

The Lessons of Contentment

If you say you’ve learned to be contented, then what lessons have you learned? A scholar who has great learning and understanding in Arts and Sciences — how did he begin? He began, we used to say, with his ABC. Then afterwards he came to his Testament and Bible, and Accidence (the part of grammar dealing with inflexions), and so to his Grammar, and afterwards to his other books. So a Christian coming to Contentment is like a scholar in Christ’s School. And there are diverse lessons to teach the soul, in order to bring it to this learning. Every godly man or woman is a scholar. It cannot be said of any Christian that he is illiterate; rather he is literate, a learned man, or a learned woman. Now, the lessons that Christ teaches to bring us to Contentment are these:

1. THE LESSON OF SELF-DENIAL.

The first great lesson is the lesson of *Self-denial*; though it is a great lesson, it is hard — as you know a child at first cries, *It is hard*. And it *is* hard. I remember what Bradford ¹ the martyr says, “Whoever has not learned the lesson of the cross, has not learned his ABC in Christianity.” Here is where Christ begins with his scholars; even those in the lowest form ² must begin with this. If you mean to be Christians at all, you must buckle to this, or you can never be Christians. Just as none can be a scholar unless he learns his ABC, so you must learn the lesson of Self-denial or you can never come to be a scholar in Christ’s School, to be learned in this Mystery of Contentment. This is the first lesson that Christ teaches any soul. Oh Self-denial. *That* brings contentment; *that* humbles and softens a man’s heart. As you know, a thing that is *soft*, if you strike it, it makes no noise. But if you strike a *hard* thing, it makes a noise. So it is with the hearts of men who are full of themselves, and hardened with self-love — if they have *any* stroke, they make a noise. But a self-denying Christian yields to God’s hand, and makes no noise. When you strike a woosack, it makes no noise because it yields to the stroke; so a self-denying heart yields to the stroke, and thereby comes to this contentment.

Now, in this lesson of Self-denial there are several things. I won’t enter into the *Doctrine* of Self-denial, but only show you how Christ *teaches* Self-denial, and how that brings contentment.

First, *Such a believer learns to know that he is nothing*. He comes to be able to say, Well, I see that I am nothing in myself. Now, a man or woman who indeed knows that he or she is nothing, and has learned it thoroughly, will be able to bear anything. The way to be able to bear anything is to know that we are nothing in ourselves. God says to us, *Will you set your eyes upon that which is nothing?* (Pro 23.5) speaking of riches. Why blessed God, don’t *You* do so? You have set your heart upon us, and yet we are nothing. God would not have set our hearts upon riches because

¹ John Bradford (1510-1555). Mary I, “Bloody Mary,” had this reformer burned at the stake along with Nicholas Ridley. Bradford looked towards heaven and said “O England, England, repent of your sins, repent of your sins. Beware of idolatry, beware of false antichrists.” The phrase, “There but for the grace of God go I,” originated with Bradford, as he watched a group of criminals being led to their execution.

² In the British education system, students are grouped into lower forms and upper forms, simpler and more advanced instruction. In the American system, these are termed “grades,” grouped into elementary, middle, and high schools.

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they are nothing; and yet God is pleased to set his heart upon us, and yet *we* are nothing. That's God's grace, free grace; and therefore it is no great matter what I suffer, for I am as nothing.

Secondly, *I deserve nothing*. I am nothing, and I deserve nothing. Suppose I don't have this or that which others have? I am sure that I deserve nothing unless it is Hell. You may so answer any of your servants who isn't content: "I marvel, what do you deserve? or your children? Do you deserve what you are so eager about?" You would stop their mouths with this. And so we may easily stop our own mouths. We deserve *nothing*, and therefore why should we be impatient if we don't get what we desire? If we had deserved anything, we might have a troubled spirit. Like a man who has deserved to be treated well by the state, or by his friends, and he doesn't find suitable encouragement — it troubles him greatly. But if he is aware that he has deserved *nothing*, he is content with a repulse.

Thirdly, *I can do nothing*. Christ says, Joh 15.5, *Without me you can do nothing*. Why should I stand so much upon it as to be troubled and discontented if I haven't got this or that — when the truth is, I can do nothing? If you come to someone who is angry because he doesn't have the diet he desires, and is discontented with it, you might say to him, "I marvel at what you do. What use are you? Should one sit still and be of no use, despite having all the supply he could possibly desire? Just consider what use you are in the world. If you consider what little need God has of you, and what little use you are, you won't be so discontented." If you have learned this lesson of Self-denial, even if God cuts you short of such and such comforts, you'll think, Since I do but little, why should I have much? This will humble a man's spirit as much as anything.

Fourthly, *I am so vile that I can receive no good of myself*. I am not only an empty vessel, but a corrupt and unclean vessel that would spoil anything that comes into it. So are all our hearts; every one of them is not only empty of good, but they are like a musty vessel, that if any good liquor is poured into it, the vessel spoils it.

Fifthly, If God cleanses us in some measure, and puts some good liquor into us, some grace of his Spirit, yet *We can make use of nothing when we have it, if God but withdraws Himself*. If God leaves us for even one moment after he has bestowed upon us the greatest gifts, and whatever abilities we can desire — if God were to say, I have given them to you, now go and trade — we cannot stir one foot further, not if God leaves us. Does God give us gifts and parts? Then let us fear and tremble lest God leave us to ourselves; for then how foully would we abuse those gifts and parts? You think other men and women have memory, and gifts, and parts, and you would gladly have them. But suppose God were to give you these, and leave you there — you would utterly spoil them.

Sixthly, *We are worse than nothing*. By sin we come to be a great deal worse than nothing. Sin makes us viler than nothing; sin makes us contrary to all good. It is a great deal worse to be contrary to all that is good, than merely being empty of all that is good. We are not empty pitchers in respect to good, but we are like pitchers filled with poison. And is it so much, then, for such as we, to be cut short of outward comforts?

Seventhly, *If we perish, there will be no loss*. If God were to annihilate me, what loss would there be? God can raise up another in my place, to do Him another manner of service than I have done.

Now, just put just these seven things together and Christ will have taught you Self-denial. I may call these, the *several words* in our Lesson of Self-denial. Christ teaches the soul this, so that as though in the presence of God, upon a real sighting of myself, I can say, "Lord, I *am* nothing; Lord, I *deserve* nothing; Lord, I *can do* nothing; I *can receive* nothing; I *can make use of* nothing; I am worse than nothing; and if I come to nothing and perish, it will be no loss at all. And therefore, what great matter is it for me to be cut short here?

A man who is little in his own eyes, will account every *affliction* to be little, and every *mercy* to be great. Consider King Saul. There was a time, the Scripture says, when he was little in his own eyes;

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and then his afflictions were but little to him. When some would not have him as King, but spoke contemptuously of him, he held his peace. But when Saul began to be big in his own eyes, *then* the affliction began to be great for him.

There was never any man or woman so contented as this: a self-denying man or woman. There was never anyone who denied himself so much as Jesus Christ did. He gave his cheeks to those who struck him; he didn't open his mouth; he was as a lamb when he was led to the slaughter; he made no noise in the street. Oh, He denied himself above all, and was willing to empty himself. And so He was the most contented of anyone who was ever in the world. The nearer we come to learn to deny ourselves as Christ did, the more contented we shall be. And by knowing much of our own vileness, we will learn to justify God.

Whatever the Lord lays upon us, the Lord is still righteous, for He has to deal with a most wretched creature. A discontented heart is troubled because he doesn't have more comfort; but a self-denying man wonders that he has as much comfort as he does. Oh, says the one, I have but a little. But the man who has learned his lesson of Self-denial says, I wonder that God bestows on me the liberty of breathing the air, knowing how vile I am, and knowing how much sin the Lord sees in me. And that's the way of contentment — by learning Self-denial.

Eighthly, there is a further thing in Self-denial which brings contentment. *Because thereby the soul comes to rejoice, and take satisfaction in all God's ways* (I beseech you to observe this). If a man is selfish, and self-love prevails in his heart, he will be glad of those things that suit his own ends. But a godly man who has denied himself, will be suited with and glad of all things that are suited to *God's* ends. A gracious heart says, God's ends are my ends, and I have denied my own ends. And so he finds contentment in all God's ends and ways. His comforts are *multiplied*, whereas the comforts of other men are *single*. It's very rare that God's ways suit a man's particular end, but God's ways always suit His own ends. Now, if you will only have contentment when God's ways suit your own ends, you can only have it now and then. But a self-denying man denies his own ends, and only looks at the ends of God, and in doing this he is contented.

When a man is selfish, he cannot help but have a great deal of trouble and vexation. For if I regard myself, my ends are so narrow that a hundred things will come and jostle me; I cannot find room in those narrow ends of my own. As you know, in the City there is a great deal of stir in the narrow streets. Thames street being so narrow, they jostle, and wrangle, and fight one another, *because* the place is so narrow. But in the broad streets, they can go quietly. So men who are selfish, meet and jostle one another — one man is for himself in one thing, and another man is for himself in another thing, and so they make a great deal of stir. But those whose hearts are enlarged, and make public things their ends, and can deny themselves, they can walk at breadth, and never jostle one another as others do. The lesson of Self-denial is the *first* lesson that Jesus Christ has men learn in seeking contentment.

2. THE VANITY OF THE CREATURE.

This is the second lesson in Christ's School, which he teaches those whom he would make Scholars in this Art. It is the vanity of the creature — that whatever there is in the creature, has an emptiness in it. *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity* (Ecc 1.2). That's the lesson the wise man learned — that the creature in itself can do us neither good nor hurt; it is all but wind. There is nothing in the creature that is suitable to a gracious heart to feed upon for its good and happiness. My brethren, the reason you don't have contentment in the things of the world, isn't because you don't have enough of them. That's not the reason. Rather, the reason is because they aren't proportionate to that immortal soul of yours, which is capable of God himself. Many men think when they are troubled, and don't have contentment, that it is because they have but little in the world; and if they had more, *then* they would be content. That would be like this: suppose a man is hungry; and to satisfy his craving stomach he gapes and holds open his mouth to take in the wind. And then he thinks

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the reason he isn't satisfied, is because he hasn't gotten enough of the wind. No, the reason is because the wind isn't suitable to a craving stomach.

Truly, there is the same madness in the world. The wind that a man takes in by gaping, would as soon satisfy a craving stomach that is ready to famish, as all the comforts in the world can satisfy a soul who knows what true happiness means. You want to be happy, and yet you seek after such and such comforts in the creature. Well, have you gotten them? Do you find that your hearts are satisfied, having the happiness which is suitable to you? No, no, it isn't here. But you *think* it is, because you want such and such things. O poor deluded man! It isn't because you haven't got enough of it, but because it's not proportionate to the immortal soul that God has given you.

Isa 55.2, *Why do you lay out money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which doesn't satisfy?* You are mad people. You seek to satisfy your stomach with that which isn't bread; you follow the wind; you'll never have contentment. All creatures in the world say contentment is not in us; riches say, contentment is not in me; pleasure says, contentment is not in me. If you look for contentment in the creature, you will fail. No, contentment is higher. When you come into the School of Christ, Christ teaches you that there is a vanity in all things in the world. And by coming into the School of Christ, by understanding the glorious mysteries of the Gospel, the soul comes to see the vanity of all things in the world. This is the soul that comes to true contentment. I could give you an abundance of proverbs from Heathens which show the vanity of all things in the world — and they didn't learn the vanity of the creature in the right school. But when a soul comes into the School of Jesus Christ, and there he comes to see vanity in all things in the world, then such a soul comes to have contentment. If you seek contentment elsewhere, like the unclean spirit, you seek rest but will find none (Mat 12.43).

A third lesson which Christ teaches a Christian when he comes into his school is this. He teaches him to understand what he never understood before, which is this:

3. WHAT THE ONE THING IS THAT IS NECESSARY.

You know what Christ said to Martha: *O Martha you burden yourself about many things, but there is one thing necessary.* The soul sought after this and the other thing before; but now it says, I see really that it isn't necessary that I be rich, but it is necessary for me to make my peace with God; it isn't necessary that I live a pleasurable life in this world, but it is absolutely necessary that I have my sin pardoned; it isn't necessary that I have honor and preferment, but it is necessary that I have God as my portion, and to have my part in Jesus Christ — it is necessary that my soul be saved in the day of Jesus Christ. The other things are pretty fine indeed, and I would be glad if God gave them to me — a fine house, and income, and clothes, and advancement for my wife and children — these are *comfortable* things, but they are not *necessary* things. I may have these and yet perish forever. But the other is absolutely necessary. No matter how poor I am, I may have what is absolutely necessary.

This is how Christ instructs the soul. Many of you have had some thoughts about this, that it is indeed necessary for you to provide for your souls. But *when you come to Christ's School*, Christ causes the fear of eternity to fall upon you. He causes such a real sight of the great things of eternity, and the absolute necessity of those things, that it possesses your heart with fear, and takes you away from all other things in the world.

Now, I would like to have shown you how that brings contentment to the soul, when it is instructed in the thing that is absolutely necessary. But so much for *this* time.

Sermon 5: The Lessons of Contentment (cont'd)

at Stepney, Thursday, Aug. 24, 1645.

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

I mentioned Three Lessons, the last time, that Christ teaches those scholars who come into his School, by which they might come to get contentment.

First, The Lesson of Self-Denial.

Secondly, The Lesson of the Vanity of the Creature.

Thirdly, The right understanding of that One Thing that is Necessary.

A little to enlarge this third one, and then proceed to others.

It is said of Pompey, that when he was carrying corn to Rome at a time of dearth, he was in a great deal of danger by storms at sea. “But,” he says, “we must go on. It is necessary that Rome should be relieved, but it is not necessary that we should live.” So it should be, certainly, that when the soul is taken up with the things that are of absolute necessity, it won’t be troubled much about other things. And what are the things that disquiet us *here*, but some matters in this world? And that’s because our hearts are not taken up with that One Absolutely Necessary thing. Who are the men who are most discontented, if not idle persons who have nothing to take up their minds? Every little thing disquiets and discontents them.

Take a man who has business of great weight and consequence. If all the things he has in his head regarding his great business go well, he isn’t aware of lesser things in the family. But a man who lies at home, and has nothing to do, finds fault with everything.

So it is with the heart: when the heart of a man has nothing to do, but to be busy about creature-comforts, every little thing troubles him. But when the heart is taken up with weighty thoughts of Eternity, the great things of Eternal Life, those things that are here below, things which disquieted him before, are now of no consideration to him in comparison to the other. So that, how things fall out here isn’t regarded by him much, if the *One thing that is Necessary* is provided for.

4. UNDERSTANDING THE RELATION OF THE SOUL TO THE WORLD.

The fourth lesson the Soul is instructed in, to come to this knowledge of the Art of Contentment, is this: *The soul comes to understand in what relation it stands here, to the world.* By that I mean *God comes to instruct the soul effectually through Christ, by his Spirit, upon what terms it lives here in the world, and in what relation it stands to it.* It is such as this: While I live in the world, my condition is to be but a pilgrim, a stranger, a traveler, and a soldier. The right understanding of this is a mighty help to contentment in whatever befalls someone. It is not only being taught this by rote, so that I can repeat the words. Rather, it is when my soul is indeed possessed with the consideration of *this* truth: that God has set me in this world, *not* as in my home, but as a mere stranger and pilgrim here; that I am travelling *here* to another home; and that *here* I am a soldier in my warfare. I say, a right understanding of this, is a mighty help to contentment in whatever befalls someone.

Now to instance this in all these conditions. When a man is at home, if he doesn’t have things according to his desire, he will find fault and isn’t contented. But if a man travels abroad,¹ perhaps he doesn’t meet with those conveniences he desires — the servants in the house are not at his beck; or they are not so diligent as his own servants were; and his diet isn’t as it was at home; and his bed isn’t as it is at home — yet this very thought may moderate a man’s spirit, “I am a traveler,

¹ *Abroad* suggests traveling to or living in a foreign country. It is far away from home and our usual surroundings. It may be a place across the sea, having a great expanse between where we are, and the home we long for.

Sermon 5: The Lessons of Contentment (cont'd).

and I must not find fault. I am in another man's house, and it would not be good manners for me to find fault when I am abroad with another man's family, even if things are not this way in my own family.

If a man meets with bad weather, he must be content. It is *Travellers fare*¹ (we used to say), both fair weather and foul weather. This is common travellers fare, and we must be content with it. But if a man were at home and rain dripped down in his house, he would consider it a bad thing, an affliction to him, and he cannot bear it. But when he is travelling abroad, if he meets with rain and storms, he isn't troubled so much.

When you are abroad at sea, though you don't have those many things that you have at home, you are not troubled by it; you are contented. Why? Because you are abroad at sea. You're not troubled by storms that arise. And though you may have many things otherwise than you would have them at home, you're still quieted with that — you are at sea.

When mariners are at sea, they don't care what clothes they have then, even if they are pitched and tarred, with but a cloth about their necks, and any plain clothes. But they think, when they arrive home, *then* they'll have their fine silk stockings and fancy suits, and laced bands, and such things, and it will be very fine. And so they are contented abroad, with the thought that it will be otherwise when they come home. And even though they have nothing but salted meat, and a little hard fare, yet when they come to their houses, then they will have anything they want.

It should be this way with us in this world. For the truth is, we are all in this world as but seafaring men, tossed up and down on the waves of the sea of this world, and our haven is Heaven. We are travellers here, but our home is another world, that home which we long for. Indeed, some men have better accommodations than others while travelling. It's true, it's a great mercy of God to us in England, in that we can travel with such delight and accommodations, more than they can in other countries. And through God's mercy, our accommodations in our travelling to Heaven are as great in England, as in any place under Heaven. Yet, though we sometimes meet with Travellers fare, yet that shouldn't be grievous to us. The Scripture tells us plainly that we must behave ourselves here as but pilgrims and strangers. 1Pet 2.11, *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*

Consider what your condition is — you are pilgrims and strangers; don't think to satisfy yourselves here. When a man comes into an inn, if there is only a fair cupboard of plate, he isn't troubled that it's not like his own. Why? Because he is going away. So let us not be troubled when we see that other men have great estates, but we don't. Why? We are going away to another country. You are lodging here but for a night, as it were.² If you should live a hundred years in comparison to eternity, it is not as so much as a night. It is as if you were travelling, and had come to an inn. And wouldn't it be madness for a man to be discontent, because he doesn't own for himself what he sees there, seeing that he may go away again within half or quarter of an hour?

So you find it in David. This was the argument that took David's heart from the things of this world, and set him on another manner of things: Psa 119.19, *I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide your commandments from me.* I am a stranger in the earth (what then?); then Lord, let me have the knowledge of Your commandments, and it's sufficient. As for the things of the earth, I don't stand upon them, whether I have much or little. But don't hide Your commandments from me Lord; let me know the rule by which I should guide my life.

¹ That is, the cost of travelling; or the light fare he carries in his rucksack.

² **Heb 11:13-16** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Again, we are not only travellers, but *soldiers*. This is the condition of the life we're in here in this world; and we are therefore to behave ourselves accordingly. So the Apostle makes use of this argument in writing to Timothy, 2Tim 2.3. *Therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. The very thought of the condition of a man who is a soldier, stills the disquiet of his heart. When he is abroad, he doesn't have that accommodation in his quarters, as he has in his own family. Perhaps a man who had his bed and curtains drawn about him, and all accommodations in his chamber at home, must now be forced to lie on straw at times; but he thinks to himself, I am a soldier, and this is suitable to my condition. He may have his bed warmed at home, but he must lie in the fields when he is a soldier abroad. And the very thought of this condition in which he stands, quiets him in all things. He even rejoices to think, This is but suitable to my condition in which God has put me. So it should be with us in respect to this world. Now, wouldn't it be an unseemly thing to see a soldier go whining up and down, with a finger to his eye, complaining that he doesn't have hot food every meal, and his bed warmed as he did at home?

Now Christians, *they* know that they in their warfare. They are here in this world fighting and combating with the enemies of their souls and their eternal condition, and they must be willing to endure hardship here. The right understanding of this — that God has put them into such a condition — is what will content them. This is especially so when they consider that they are certain of the victory, and that before long they will triumph with Jesus Christ. Then all their sorrows will be done away, and their tears wiped from their eyes. A soldier is content to endure hardship, even if he doesn't know that he will have the victory. But a Christian knows he is a soldier, and he knows that he shall conquer and triumph with Jesus Christ to all eternity.

That is the fourth lesson that Christ teaches the soul when He brings it into his School to learn the Art of Contentment. Christ makes him understand thoroughly the relation which he has placed him in, in this world.

The fifth lesson that Christ teaches is this: He teaches us what any good consists in, that is to be enjoyed in any creature ¹ in the world.

5. WHAT GOOD MAY BE ENJOYED IN ANY CREATURE IN THE WORLD.

It's true, and it has been taught before, that there is a vanity in the creature, taking the creature as considered in itself. And yet, even though there is a vanity in the creature itself, in respect to satisfying the soul for its portion, there is still some goodness in the creature. Though there is a vanity, there is also some desirableness. But what does that consist in? It doesn't consist in the nature of the creature itself, for that's nothing but vanity. Rather, it consists in the reference it has to the First-being of all things. This is a lesson that Christ teaches. If there is any good in an estate, or in any comforts in this world, it is not so much that it pleases my senses, or that it suits my body, but it's the reference that it has to God, the First-being — that by these creatures, there should be something of God's goodness conveyed to me; and that I may have a sanctified use of the creature to draw me nearer to God; and that I may enjoy more of God; and be made more serviceable for the glory of God in the place where He has set me. *This* is the good of the creature.

Oh, if only we were instructed in this lesson, and understood it, and thoroughly believed it! No creature in all the world has any goodness in it any further than it has reference to the first infinite Supreme Good of all. So far as I can enjoy God in it, so far it is good to me; and so far as I don't enjoy God in it, so far there is no goodness in anything that I have in the creature. How easy it would be for someone to be contented then. Suppose a man had great estate only a few years ago, and now it is all gone. I would but appeal to this man," When you had your estate, what did you reckon the good of that estate consisted in?"

¹ Recall, "creature" refers to any created thing or being. "Do not love the world or anything in the world," 1Joh 2.15.

Sermon 5: The Lessons of Contentment (cont'd).

A carnal heart would say, "Anybody knows that. It brought me in so much a year, and so I could afford the best, and be a man of repute in the place where I live, and men would regard what I said. I might be clothed as I would, and lay up portions for my children. The good of my estate consisted in this." This man never came into the School of Christ to know what the good of an estate consisted in. So it is no marvel if he is disquieted when he has lost his estate.

But now, a Christian who has been in the School of Christ, and has been instructed in the Art of Contentment, when such a man has an estate, he thinks thus: "Because I have an estate above my brethren, the good of it to me consists in this: that I have an opportunity to serve God better; and I enjoy a great deal of God's mercy conveyed to me through the creature; and by this I am enabled to do a great deal of good. And I reckon the good of my estate in this. Now God has taken this away from me. If He is pleased to make up my enjoyment of Him in some other way, or He calls me to honor him by suffering, and if I may do God as much service now by suffering, as I did in prosperity — that is, by showing the grace of his Spirit in my sufferings — then I have as much of God now as I had before. If I may be led to God in my low condition, as much as I was in my prosperous condition, then I have as much comfort and contentment now as I had before."

Objection. But you may say, It's true, if I could honor God as much in my low estate as in my prosperous estate, then it would be something; but how can that be?

Answer. You must know, the special honor that God receives from his creatures in this world, is the manifestation of the graces of his Spirit. It's true, God has a great deal of honor when a man is in a public position, and so he is able to do a great deal of good — to countenance godliness, and discountenance sin. But the main thing is *showing forth the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light* (1Pet 2.9).

If I can say that through God's mercy in my affliction, I find the graces of God's Spirit working as strongly in me as they ever did when I had my estate, then I am where I was. Indeed, I am in quite as good a condition; for I have that good now which I had in my prosperous estate. For I reckoned the good of it only in my enjoyment of God, and honoring of God. And now God has blessed the lack of it to stir up the graces of His Spirit in my soul. This is the work that God now calls me to; and I must reckon God to be most honored when I do the work that He calls me to. He set me to work in my prosperous estate at *that* time, to honor him in *that* condition. And now he sets me to work at *this* time, to honor him in *this* condition. God is most honored when I can accordingly turn from one condition to another, as He calls me to it.

Would you consider yourselves honored by your servants, when you set them about a new work that has some excellency in it, and they go on and on in their current work, and you can't get them away from it? However good their current work is, if you call them away to another work, you would expect them to manifest enough respect for you, as to be content to come away from that — even if they are now given a lesser work — if it is more suitable to your ends. So, you were in a prosperous estate, and there God called you to some service that you took pleasure in. But suppose God says, I will now use you in a suffering condition, and have you honor me in that way? *Here's the honoring of God:* that you can turn this way or that, as God calls you to it.

Thus you have now learned this, that the good of the creature consists in the enjoyment of God in it, and the honoring of God by it. You can be content, because you have the same good that you had before. And that's the fifth lesson.

The sixth lesson that Christ teaches the soul that He brings into this School, is this:

6. HE INSTRUCTS SUCH A MAN OR WOMAN IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR OWN HEARTS.

You must learn this, or you will never learn contentment. You must learn to know your own hearts well, to be good students of your own hearts. You cannot all be scholars in the Arts and Sciences

Sermon 5: The Lessons of Contentment (cont'd).

in the world, but you may all be students of your own hearts. You cannot read in the Book (many of you) without God expecting, every day, that you should turn over a leaf in your own hearts. You will never gain any skill in this Mystery of Contentment, unless you study the book of your own hearts. Mariners have their books that they study if they would be good navigators; and Scholars have their books; those who study Logic have their books; those who study Rhetoric and Philosophy have their books; those who study Divinity have their books by which they come to be helped in the study of Divinity. But a Christian (next to the Book of God) is to look into the book of his own heart, and read it over. This will help you to contentment in these three ways:

1. By studying your heart, you will quickly come to *discover where your discontent lies* when you are discontented. You will find out the *root* of any discontent, if you study your heart well. Many men and women are discontented; and the truth is, they don't know why. They think this and the other thing is the cause. But a man or woman who knows their own heart will find out quickly where the root of their discontent lies. It lies in some corruption and distemper of my heart, that now, through God's mercy I have now found out. In this case, it is like a little child who is very froward in the house. If a *stranger* comes in, he doesn't know what the matter is. So perhaps he gives the child a rattle, or a nut, or some such thing to quiet it. But when the *nurse* comes in, she knows the temper and disposition of the child, and therefore she knows how best to quiet it.

So it is here. When we are strangers with our own hearts, we are mightily discontented. We don't know how to quiet ourselves, because we don't know *where* the disquiet lies. And indeed, when we are strangers to our own hearts, we cannot tell *how* to quiet ourselves. But if we are very well versed in our own hearts, then when anything happens to disquiet us, we soon find out the cause of it, and so we quickly come to be quiet.

Take a man who has a watch, and he understands the use of every wheel and pin. If it goes amiss, he will quickly find out the cause of it. But someone who has no skill in a watch, when it goes amiss he doesn't know what the matter is, and therefore he cannot mend it. So indeed, our hearts are like a watch. There are many wheels, and windings, and turnings there;. And we should labor to know our hearts well, so that when they are out of tune, we may know what the matter is.

2. This knowledge of our hearts will help us to contentment, because by this *we will come to know what is most suitable to our condition*. A man who doesn't know his own heart, doesn't think what need he has of affliction; and upon that he is disquieted. But the man or woman who has studied their own hearts, when God comes with afflictions upon them, they can say, I wouldn't have been without this affliction for anything in the world. God has so suited this affliction to my condition, and it has come in such a way, that if this affliction hadn't come, I'm afraid I would have fallen into sin.

A poor ignorant man who takes medicine, and the medicine works, may think it will kill him, because he doesn't know the maladies that are in his body. And therefore he doesn't understand how suitable the medicine is for him. But say a physician takes a purge, and it makes him extremely sick. He says, "I like this better; it's working on the malady that I know is the cause of my disease." Thus the man who has knowledge and understanding of his body, and of the cause of his distemper, isn't troubled or disquieted by the cure.

So we would be, if we but knew the distempers of our own hearts. Carnal men and women don't know their own spirits, and therefore they lash out and chafe at every affliction that befalls them. They don't know what distempers are in their hearts that may be *healed* by their afflictions, if it pleases God to give them a sanctified use of them.

3. By knowing their own hearts, *they know what they are able to manage*; and by this means they come to be content. Perhaps the Lord takes away many comforts that they had before, or denies them some things they hoped to have gotten. Now, by knowing their hearts they know this: that they were not able to manage such an estate, and they were not able to manage such prosperity.

“God saw it, and (a poor soul says) I am in some measure convinced by looking into my own heart, that I was not able to manage such a condition.” A man greedily desires to grip more perhaps than he is able to manage, and so he undoes himself. As men in the country observe, if they overstock their land, it will quickly spoil. And so a wise husbandman who knows how much his ground will bear, is not troubled that he doesn’t have as much stock as others. Why? Because he knows he doesn’t have enough ground for so great a stock, and that quiets him. Thus many men and women who don’t know their own hearts, would gladly have as prosperous estate as others have. But if they knew their own hearts, they would know that they aren’t able to manage it.

If one of your little children, three or four years old, were crying for the coat of her sister who is twelve or fourteen years old, and said, “Why may I not have a coat as long as my sister’s?” If she did, it would soon trip her heels, and break her face. But when the child comes to understand, she isn’t discontented because her coat isn’t as long as her sister’s. She says, “My coat is fit for me,” and she is content. So if we come to understanding in the school of Christ, we won’t cry, “Why don’t I have an estate like others have?” Instead, “The Lord sees that I’m not able to manage it; and knowing my own heart, I see it myself.” There are some children who, if they see a knife, will cry for it, because they don’t know their strength, and that they’re not able to manage it. But *you* know they’re not able to manage it, and therefore you won’t give it them. When they come to such an understanding as to know they’re not able to manage it, they won’t cry for it.

So we wouldn’t cry for some such things if we knew we weren’t able to manage them. When you chafe and fret for what you don’t have, I may say to you as Christ says, *You know not of what spirit you are* (Luk 9.55). It was said by Oecolampadius to Parillus when they were speaking about his extreme poverty, *Not so poor, though I have been very poor, yet I would be poorer; I could be willing to be poorer than I am*. It’s as if he had said, “For the truth is, the Lord knew that was more suitable for me; and I knew that my own heart was such, that a poor condition was more suitable to me than a rich one.” So certainly we would say, if we knew our own hearts, that such and such a condition is better for us, than if it had been otherwise.

7. THE SEVENTH LESSON IS THE BURDEN OF A PROSPEROUS ESTATE.

Someone who comes into Christ’s School to be instructed in this Art, never attains any great skill in it, until he comes to understand the burden that there is in a prosperous estate.

Objection. You may say, What burden is there in a prosperous estate?

Answer. Yes, certainly it is a *great* burden, and it needs great strength to bear it. As men need strong brains to bear strong wine, so they need strong spirits that are able to bear prosperous conditions, and not to do themselves hurt. There is a fourfold burden in a prosperous estate. Many men and women look at the shine and glitter of prosperity, but they think little of the burden. And there is a fourfold burden.

1. *There is a burden of trouble.* A rose has its prickles, and so the Scripture says that *he that would be rich pierces himself through with many sorrows* (1Tim 6.10). If a man’s heart is set upon being rich, and he would be rich, such a man will pierce himself through with many sorrows. He looks upon the delight and glory of riches that appear outwardly, but he doesn’t consider what piercing sorrows he may meet with in them. The consideration of the trouble in a prosperous condition, I have thought about at various times. And I cannot tell by what analogy to express it better, than by travelling in some champaign countryside,¹ where all around is very fair and sandy ground. And you see a town a great way off in a valley, and you think, Oh how finely that town is situated. But when you come to it, and ride into the town, you ride through a dirty lane, and through a company of fearful dirty holes. You couldn’t see the dirty lane and holes when you were two or three miles off. So sometimes we look at the prosperity of men and think, Such a man lives

¹ *Champaign*: a broad plain; a flat expanse of land (also *champion*).

finely and comfortably. But if we only knew what troubles he meets with in his family, in his estate, in his dealings with men, we wouldn't think his condition is so happy. A man may have a very fine new shoe, but nobody knows where it pinches him, except the one who has it on. So you think such men are happy, but they may have many troubles that you little think of.

2. *There is a burden of danger in it.* Men who are in a prosperous condition, are in a great deal of danger. You see sometimes in the evening, when you light up your candles, the moths and gnats will fly up and down in the candle and scorch their wings, and there they fall down dead. So there is a great deal of danger in a prosperous estate; those men who are set on a pinnacle on high, are in greater danger than other men. Honey, we know, invites bees and wasps to it; and so the sweet of prosperity invites the Devil and temptation. Men who are in a prosperous estate are subject to many temptations that other men are not subject to. The Scripture calls the Devil *Beelzebub*, that is, the god of flies; and so Beelzebub comes to where the honey of prosperity is. Those who are in a prosperous condition, are in very great danger of temptations. The dangers of men who are in a prosperous estate, who have more than others, should be considered by those who are in a lower estate. Think to yourself, "Though they are above me, yet they are in more danger than I am."

The tall trees are shattered a great deal more than low shrubs. And you know the ship that has all its sails up in a storm, topsail and all, is in more danger than one that has all its sails drawn in. And so men who have their top gallant, and all is up and grand, are more likely to be drowned in perdition than other men. And therefore you know what the Scripture says, *how hard it is for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven* (Mat 19.23). Such a text should make poor people contented with their estates. We have a notable example of this in the children of Kohath. You'll find that they were in a more excellent estate than the other Levites, but they were in more danger than the others, and in more trouble.

(1.) First, I will show you out of Num 4.14, that the children of Kohath were in a higher condition than others of the Levites. There you find what their condition was: *This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the Tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things.* Note that the Levites were employed about *holy things*, but the service of the sons of Kohath was about the *most holy things* of all. And you'll find in Joshua 21 that God honored the sons of Kohath in more special way than He honored the other Levites. The children of Aaron had this honor (being of the families of the *Kohathites*, who were the children of *Levi*). For theirs was the first Lot (Jos 21.10);¹ and they were preferred before the other families of Levi. Those who were employed in the most honorable employment, had the most honorable Lot — the first Lot fell to them. Thus you see that God honored the children of the Kohathites. But (other Levites might say), how has God preferred this family before us?

They were honored more than the others, but mark the burden that comes with their honor. I will show you out of two Scriptures. The first is Num 7.6-9, *And Moses took the wagons and oxen, and gave them to the sons of Gershom, according to their service. And four wagons and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari according to their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But he says (verse 9), To the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of the sanctuary that belonged to them was that they should bear [the holy things] upon their shoulders.* Mark, the other Levites had oxen and wagons given to them, to ease them in their service. But he gave none to the sons of Kohath; they were to bear their service upon their shoulders. And that's the reason God was so displeased — because they would have more ease in God's service, than God would have for them. For where they should carry it upon their shoulders, they would carry it upon a cart. Mark this here: you see the first burden that they had, beyond what the other Levites had. And regarding those who are in more honorable

¹ **Jos 21:9-10** So they gave from the tribe of the children of Judah and from the tribe of the children of Simeon these cities which are designated by name, which were for the children of Aaron, one of the families of the Kohathites, *who were* of the children of Levi; for the lot was theirs first.

Sermon 5: The Lessons of Contentment (cont'd).

positions than others, those who are under them don't think of the burden that these men carry on their shoulders, while others have means to ease them. Many times those who are employed in the ministry or magistracy, who sit at the stern to order the great affairs of the Commonwealth and State — you think they live finely. But they lie awake when you are asleep. If you knew the burden that lies upon their spirits, you would think that your labor and burden were very little in comparison to theirs.

(2.) There is another burden of danger that is more than the rest. You'll find it in Num 4.17: *And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, Don't cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites, but thus do to them, so that they may live and not die: When they approach the most holy things, Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint them, every one to his service and to his burden; but they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.* Mark this text: the Lord says to Moses and Aaron, Don't cut off the tribe of the family of the Kohathites from among the Levites. Don't cut them off. Why? What had they done? Had they done anything amiss? No, they hadn't done anything that provoked God. Rather, the meaning is this: take great care to instruct the family of the Kohathites; to instruct them in their duty that they were to do. For (says God) they are in a great deal of danger, to serve in the most holy things. If they were to go in to see the holy things, beyond what God would have them see, it will cost them their lives. And therefore, if you were but to neglect them, and not inform them thoroughly in their duty, they will be undone. Says God, They are to administer in the most holy things. And if they but dare to presume to do anything otherwise than God would have them do about those services, it would cost them their lives. And therefore, don't you be careless of them; for if you neglect them, you will be a means of cutting them off. Thus you see the danger that the family of the Kohathites were in. They were preferred before others, but they were also in more danger.

So you may think there are such men in a parish, who bear the sway and are employed in public service, and they carry all before them; but you don't consider their danger. And so the ministers stand in the forefront of all the spite and malice of ungodly men. Indeed, God employs them in honorable service, that service which the angels would take delight in. But though the service is honorable, above the employment of other works, yet the burden of danger is likewise greater than the danger of men who are in an inferior position. Now, when the soul comes to get wisdom from Christ, to think of the danger that it is in, *then* it will be content in that low estate in which it is found. A poor man in a low condition will think, "I am low, and others are raised; but I don't know what their burden is." And so, if he is rightly instructed in the School of Christ, he comes to be contented.

3. *In a prosperous estate, there is the burden of **duty**.* You look only at the sweet and comfort they have, and the honor and respect they have, who are in a prosperous position. But you must consider the *duty* that they owe to God. God requires more duty at their hands than at yours. You are ready to be discontented because you don't have such parts and abilities as they have. But God requires more duty from those who have greater estates, than from you who don't have such estates. Oh you would gladly have the honor; but can you carry the burden of the duty?

4. Lastly, *The burden of **account** in a prosperous estate.* There is a great account that those who enjoy great wealth and a prosperous condition are to give to God. Now, we're all stewards. And one is a steward to a lesser man, perhaps an ordinary Knight. Another is a steward to a Nobleman, say an Earl. Now, the steward of the lesser man doesn't have so much under his hand as the other. Should he be discontented because of this? No. He thinks, "I have less, and I will have to give a lesser account." So your account, in comparison to the minister's and magistrate's, will be nothing. You are to give an account of your own souls, and so are they. You are to give an account for your own family, and so are they. But you will not have to give account for congregations, and for towns, and cities, and countries. You think of princes and kings, "Oh, what a glorious condition they are

in!” But what do you think of a king who must give an account for the disorder and wickedness in his kingdom, that he might possibly have prevented? What abundance of glory might a Prince bring to God if he bent his soul and all his thoughts to lift up the name of God in his kingdom! Now, what God loses for lack of this, that King, Prince, or Governor must give an account for.

There is a saying of Chrysostom on that passage in Hebrews, where it is said that men must give an account for their souls (Heb 13.17). He wonders that any man in a public position can be saved, because the account they have to give is so great. I remember I read a statement of Philip, the King of Spain. The story says of him, that he had such a natural conscience, that he professed he wouldn't do anything against his conscience — no, not even in secret, not for gaining a world. And yet, when this man was about to die, he said, “Oh that I had never been a king! Oh, that I had lived a solitary and private life all my days! Then I would have died a great deal more secure. I would have gone before the throne of God with more confidence, to give my account. This is the fruit of my kingdom — because I had all the glory of it, it has made it harder to give my account to God.” Thus he cried out when he was to die.

And therefore, you who live in private conditions remember this: if you come into Christ's School, and are taught this lesson, you will be quiet in your afflictions, or your private estates, in regard to your account not being as great as others. I remember a phrase I met with in Latimer's sermons, that he was in the habit of saying, *that half is more than the whole*. That is, when a man is in a lowly condition, he is but halfway towards the height of prosperity that others are in. *Yet*, he says, *this is safer, though it is a lower condition than others*. Those who are in a high and prosperous condition, have the burden of trouble, of danger, of duty, and of account annexed to it. And thus you see how Christ trains up his Scholars in his School. Though they may be weak otherwise, yet by His Spirit he gives them wisdom to understand these aright.

8. WHAT A GREAT AND DREADFUL EVIL IT IS TO BE GIVEN UP TO OUR HEART'S DESIRES.

The eighth lesson is this: Christ teaches them *what a great and dreadful evil it is to be given up to their heart's desires*. The understanding of this lesson is that it is a most dreadful evil — one of the most hideous and fearful evils that can befall any man on the face of the earth — for God to give him up to his heart's desires. Once the soul understands this — and together with it (for they goes along together) that *spiritual judgments are more fearful than any outward judgments in the world* — understanding this will teach anyone to be content when God crosses him in his desires. Say you are crossed in your desires, and now you are discontented, vexed, and fretted about it. Is that your only misery, that you are crossed in your desires? No, no, you are infinitely mistaken. The greatest misery of all is for God to give you up to your heart's lusts and desires, to give you up to your own counsels.

So you have it in Psa 81.11-12: *But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would have none of me. What then? So I gave them up to their own heart's lust, and they walked in their own counsels*. “Oh,” says Bernard, “Let me not have such a misery as that, to give me what I would have, to give me my heart's desires.” It is one of the most hideous judgments in the world, for a man to be given up to his heart's desires. We don't have in Scripture, any certain evident sign of a reprobate. We cannot say that he is a reprobate (unless we knew a man had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, Mat 12.31), for we don't know what God may work upon him. But the nearest of all, and the blackest sign of a reprobate is this: for God to give a man up to his heart's desires.¹ All the pain of diseases, all the calamities that can be thought of in the world, are no judgments in comparison to this.

¹ **2Chr 30:7** “And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see. **Psa 81:12** So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, To walk in their own counsels.

Sermon 5: The Lessons of Contentment (cont'd).

Now, once the soul comes to understand this, it then cries out, Why am I so troubled that I haven't gotten my desires? There is nothing that God conveys his wrath more through, than a prosperous estate. I remember I read of a Jewish tradition about Uzziah, when God struck him with leprosy (2Chr 26.19). They say that the beams of the sun darted upon the forehead of Uzziah, and he was struck with leprosy by the darting beams. The Scripture says, indeed, that the priests looked upon him. But these commentators say there was a special light and beam of the sun on his forehead that revealed the leprosy to the priests; *and* they say it was the way of conveying it. Whether true or not, I am sure *this* is true: that the strong beams of the sun of prosperity upon many men, makes them leprous. Would any poor man in the country have been discontented that he was not in Uzziah's condition? He was a great King, yes, but there was leprosy in his forehead. The poor man may say, "Though I live plainly in the country, I thank God that my body is whole and sound." Wouldn't any man rather have russet ¹ and skins of beasts to clothe himself with, than to have satin and velvet that had the plague on it? The Lord conveys the plague of His curse through prosperity, as much as through anything in the world. And so, the soul coming to understand this, makes it quiet and content.

And then, the other part: *Spiritual Judgments are the greatest judgments of all.* The Lord may lay an affliction upon my outward estate, but what if he had taken away my life? A man's health is a greater mercy than his estate; and you who are poor people, you should consider that. But isn't the health of a man's body better than his estate? What then is the health of a man's soul? That is a *great* deal better. The Lord has inflicted external judgments, but He hasn't inflicted spiritual judgments on you. He hasn't given you up to hardness of heart, and taken away the spirit of prayer from you in your afflicted estate.² Oh then, be of good comfort; even though there are outward afflictions upon you, yet your soul, your more excellent part, is not afflicted.

Now, when the soul comes to understand this, that here lies the sore wrath of God — to be given up to a man's desires, and to have spiritual judgments upon him — this quiets and contents him, even though outward afflictions are upon him. Perhaps one of a man's children has the fit of an ague, ³ or a toothache, but his next-door neighbor has the plague, or all his children are dead of the plague. Now, will this man be so discontented because his child has toothache, when his neighbor's children are dead? Think this way: "Lord, You have laid an afflicted condition upon me, but you haven't given me the plague of a hard heart."

Now, take these eight things mentioned, lay them together, and you may well apply that Scripture in Isa 29.24, where it says, *Those also, who erred in spirit, shall come to understanding; and those who murmured, shall learn doctrine.* Have there been any of you (as I fear many may be found) who have erred in spirit, even in regard to this truth that we are now preaching about, and many who have murmured? Oh, that this day you might come to understand — that Christ would bring you into his School, and teach you understanding. *And those who murmured shall learn doctrine* — what doctrine shall they learn? These eight doctrines that I have opened to you. And if you will but thoroughly study these lessons that I have set before your eyes, it will be a special help and means to cure your murmurings against, and your repinings at the hand of God. And so you will come to learn Christian Contentment. May the Lord teach you thoroughly by his Spirit, these lessons of contentment!

¹ *Russet*: homespun cloth, reddish brown in color.

² **Psa 51:11** Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

³ *Ague*: feverish shivering or shaking.

Sermon 6: The Excellencies of Contentment.

at Stepney, Thursday, Aug. 31, 1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

I will add only one Lesson more in the learning of Contentment, and then I will come to the fourth Head, The Excellencies of Contentment. The ninth and last lesson which Christ teaches those whom he instructs in this Art of Contentment, is this:

9. THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

And in this, are these four things.

(1.) *The Universality of Providence.* The soul must be thoroughly instructed in this, to come to this Art of Contentment. It must understand the *universality* of providence; that is, how the providence of God goes through the whole world, and extends itself to everything. Not only that God by his providence rules the world, and governs all things in general, but that it reaches to every particular — not only to Kingdoms, to order their great affairs — but it reaches to every man's family; it reaches to every person in the family; it reaches to every condition; yes, to every passage; to everything that happens concerning you, in every particular. Not one hair falls from your head, not a sparrow to the ground, without the providence of God. Nothing befalls you, good or evil, without the providence of the infinite, eternal, First-being in that thing. And therein is indeed God's infiniteness — that it reaches to the least things, to the least worm that is under your feet. And then much more, it reaches to you who are a rational creature; the providence of God is more especially towards rational creatures than any others.

It is a mighty furtherance to contentment, to understand in a spiritual way, the universality of providence in every particular passage from morning to night, every day — that there is nothing that befalls you, that the hand of God is not in it; it is all from God. Every man will grant the truth of this, that it is so. But as the Apostle says in Heb 11:3: *By faith we understand that the worlds were made* — by faith we understand it. Why by faith? We can understand by reason that no finite thing can be from itself; and therefore that the world could not be of itself. But we can understand it *by faith*, in another manner than by *reason*. So whatever we understand of God in a way of providence, when Christ takes us into his School, we come to understand it *by faith*, in a better manner than we do by *reason*.

(2.) *The Efficacy that there is in Providence* — that is, that the providence of God goes on in all things, with strength and power; and it is not to be altered by our power. If we are discontented, vexed, and troubled, and we fret and rage, we must not think we will alter the course of providence by our discontent. When they saw Job being impatient, some of his friends said to him, *Shall the earth be forsaken for you, and the rock be removed from its place?* (Job 18.4).

So I may say to every discontented, impatient heart: What, shall the providence of God change its course for you? Do you think it is such a weak thing, that because it doesn't please you, it must alter its course? Whether you are content or not content, the providence of God will go on. It has an efficacy of power and virtue to carry all things before it. Can you make one hair black or white with all the stir that you make? When you are in a ship at sea, which has all her sails spread with a full gale of wind, and is swiftly sailing, can you make it stand still by running up and down in the ship? No more could you make the providence of God alter and change its course with your vexing and fretting; it will go on with power, whatever you do. Just understand the power and efficacy of providence, and it will be a mighty means for helping you to learn this Lesson of Contentment.

(3.) *The Infinite Variety of the Works of Providence*, and yet *the order of things, one working towards another*. There is an infinite variety of the works of God in ordinary providence; and yet

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all work in an ordinary way. We put these two together, for God in the way of His Providence causes a thousand thousand things, one depending upon another. There are infinite separate wheels (if I may say so) in the works of Providence. All the works that God ever did from all eternity, or ever will do, if you put them all together, they all make up but one work. And they have been like several wheels, that have had their orderly motion to attain the end God has appointed from all eternity.

We indeed look at things by pieces. We look at one particular, and don't consider the relation that one thing has to another. But God looks at all things at once, and sees the relation that one thing has to another. A child who looks at a clock, looks first at one wheel, and then at another wheel. He doesn't look at them all together, or at the dependence that one has upon another. But the workman has his eyes upon them all together, and sees the dependence of all, one upon another, and the art there is in that dependence. So it is, in God's providence.

Now observe how this works to contentment. Where such a passage of providence befalls me, that's one wheel. And it may be that if this wheel were stopped, a thousand other wheels might come to be stopped by this. As in a clock, stop but one wheel and you stop every wheel, because they are dependent one upon another. So when God has ordered a thing for the present to be thus and so, how do you know how many things depend upon this one thing? God may have some work that He has to do twenty years from now, that may depend on this passage of providence that falls out this day, or this week.

And here (by the way) we may see what a great deal of evil there is in discontentment. For you would have God's providence altered in such and such a particular. If indeed it were only in that particular, and that particular had reference to nothing else, it wouldn't be so much. But by your desire to have your will in such a particular, it may be that you would cross God in a thousand things that He has to bring about — because it is possible that a thousand things that He has to bring about, depend on that one thing that you would gladly have other than it is. It's as if a child cried out and said, "Let just that one wheel stop." Though he says *just one wheel*, yet if that stops, it's the same as if he had said *they must all stop*. So it is in providence: let but this one passage of providence stop, and it's the same as if a thousand stopped.

Let me therefore be quiet and content. For though I am crossed in some one particular, God attains his end. Or at least his end may be furthered in a thousand things, by this one thing that I am crossed in. Therefore let a man consider, "This is an act of providence. How do I know what God is about to do, and how many things depend upon this providence?" Now we are willing to be allow our friend's will to be crossed in one thing, so that our friend may attain to what he desires in a thousand things. If you have a love for and friendship with God, be willing to be crossed in a few things, so that the Lord may have his work go on universally, in a thousand other things. That's the third thing to be understood in God's providence, that Christ would have those learn, that he teaches in the Art of Contentment.

(4.) Christ teaches them *the Knowledge of Providence* — that is, *The knowledge of God's usual way in dealing with His people more particularly*. The other is the knowledge of God in his providence *in general*.¹ But the right understanding of the way of God in his providence towards His people and saints, is a notable lesson to help us in the Art of Contentment. Once we come to know a man's way and course, we may better suit him, and be contented to live with him, than before we came to know his way and course. As when a man comes to live in a society with men and women, it may be that the men and women are good. But till a man comes to know their way, and course, and disposition, many things may fall out very cross, and he thinks they are very hard.

¹ Or, God's *common grace*. **Mat 5:45** "...for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

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But when we come to be acquainted with their way and spirits, then we can suit and concur with them very well. The reason for our trouble is because we don't understand their way.

So it is with you. Those who are like strangers to God, and don't understand the way of God, are troubled by the providences of God. They think they are very strange, and cannot tell what to make of them, because they don't understand the ordinary course and way of God towards His People. If a stranger at some time comes into a family, and sees such and such things done, he wonders what the matter is. But those who are acquainted with it aren't troubled by it at all. So too when servants first come together, and don't know one another, it may be that they are froward (resistant) and discontented. But when they come to be acquainted with one another's ways, then they are more contented. It is just so when we first come to understand God's ways.

Objection. But you may ask, *What do you mean by "God's ways"?*

Answer. By that I mean *three things*. And when we come to know them, we won't wonder so much at the providence of God, but will be quiet and contented with them. The first thing is this:

1. *God's ordinary course is that His People in this world should be in an afflicted condition.* God has revealed in his Word, and there we may find, that He has set this down as his ordinary way — that His People here should be in an afflicted condition. This is so even from the beginning of the world to this day, but more especially in the times of the Gospel. Now, men who don't understand this, stand and wonder to hear of the people of God being afflicted, and that their enemies prosper in their way. For those who seek God in His way, and seek reformation — for them to be afflicted, routed, and spoiled, and their enemies to prevail — they wonder at that. But now, one who is in the School of Christ, is taught by Jesus Christ that God, by His eternal counsels, has set this to be His usual course and way: to bring up His People in this world in an afflicted condition. And therefore the Apostle says, *Don't count it strange concerning the fiery trial* (1Pet 4.12). Therefore, we are not to be discontented with it, seeing that God has set such a course and way, and we know that such is the will of God, that it should be so.

The second thing that is in God's ordinary way is this:

2. *Usually when God intends the greatest mercy to any of his people, He brings them into the lowest condition.*

In this, God seems to go quite crossways, and to work in a contrary way. When he intends the greatest mercies to his people, he usually brings them into very low conditions first. If it is a bodily mercy, an *outward* mercy that He intends to bestow, he usually brings them low bodily, and low *outwardly*. If it is a mercy in their estates that he intends to bestow, he brings them low in that, and *then* raises them; and in their reputations, he brings them low there, and then raises them; and in their spirits, God ordinarily brings their spirits low, and then raises their spirits. Usually before their greatest comforts, the people of God have the greatest afflictions and sorrows.

Now, those who don't understand God's ways, think that when God brings His people into sad conditions, He leaves and forsakes them, and that He intends them no great matter of good. But a child of God, who is instructed in this way of God, is not troubled. "My condition is very low," he says, "but this is God's way when he intends the greatest mercy — to bring men under the greatest afflictions." When He intended to raise Joseph to be Second in the Kingdom [of Egypt], God cast him into a dungeon shortly before. So when God intended to raise David, and set him upon the throne, He had him hunted like a partridge in the mountains (1Sam 26.20). God went this way with his Son. Christ himself went into glory by suffering (Heb 2.10). And if God dealt so with his own Son, then so much the more with his people.

Just as a little before break of day, you observe that it is darker than it was at any time before, so God usually makes our conditions darker a little before the mercy comes. When God bestowed the

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last great mercy at Naseby¹ we were in a very low condition; God knew what he had to do beforehand. He knew that his time was coming for great mercies — it is the way of God to do so. If we are but instructed aright in this course and track that God uses to walk in, that will help us to contentment exceedingly.

The third thing that there is in God's way and course is this:

3. *It is the way of God to work by contraries, to turn the greatest evil into the greatest good.*

To grant great good after great evil is one thing; and to turn great evils into the greatest good is another. And yet *that's* God's way. The greatest good that God intends for his people, he will many times work it out of the greatest evil; the greatest light is brought out of the greatest darkness. Luther, I remember, has a notable expression for this. He says, "It is the way of God: He humbles that he might exalt; He kills that he might make alive; He confounds that he might glorify." This is the way of God, he says, but everyone doesn't understand it. This is the Art of Arts, and the Science of Sciences, the Knowledge of Knowledges — to understand that when God would bring life, He usually brings it out of death; He brings joy out of sorrow; and He brings prosperity out of adversity. Yes, and many times He brings grace out of sin. That is, He makes use of sin to work the furtherance of grace. It is the way of God to bring good out of evil — not only to overcome the evil, but to make the evil work towards good. Here is the way of God. Now, when the soul comes to understand this, it will take away our murmuring, and bring contentment into our spirits. But I fear there are few who understand it aright. Perhaps they read of such things, and hear of such things in a sermon; but they're not instructed in this by Jesus Christ: that *this* is the way of God — to bring the greatest good out of the greatest evil.

The Excellencies of Contentment

Thus having dispatched the Third Head (the *Lessons* we are to learn), we come now to the Fourth; and that is *The Excellency of this Grace of Contentment*. There is a great deal of excellency in Contentment; and that too is a kind of lesson for us to learn. This Head will likewise be somewhat long.

The apostle says, *I have learned*. It is as if he said: Blessed be God for this: Oh! it is a mercy of God to me, that I have learned this lesson. I find so much good in this Contentment, that I would not for the world be without it. "I have learned it," he says.

Now, even the heathen philosophers caught sight of the great excellency there is in Contentment. I remember reading of Antisthenes,² who desired of his gods (speaking in the heathenish way) nothing in this world to make his life happy, except CONTENTMENT. And if he might have anything that he would desire to make his life happy, he would ask of them that he might have the spirit of Socrates — to be able to bear any wrong, any injuries that he met with, and to continue in a quiet temper of spirit, whatever befell him. For that was the temper of Socrates, that whatever befell him, he continued the same man; whatever befell him, however great the crosses, nobody could perceive any alteration of his spirit. A *heathen* attained to this by the strength of nature, and by a common work of the Spirit. Now, Antisthenes saw such an excellency in this spirit. When God said to Solomon, What shall I give you? Solomon asked for wisdom. So Antisthenes said, If the gods were to ask me what I would have, I would desire *this* thing: that I might have the spirit of Socrates. He saw what a great excellency there was in it. And certainly a Christian may see an abundance of excellency in it. I will labor to set it out to you in this Sermon, so that you might be in love with this Grace of Contentment. In the first place,

¹ In 1645, the Parliamentary army won a decisive victory against the Royalists at Naseby, Northamptonshire. These sermons were preached by Burroughs that same year.

² Antisthenes (c. 446-366 BC) — a Greek philosopher and a pupil of Socrates; founder of *Cynic* philosophy, which teaches that virtue is the only good, and that the essence of virtue is self-control.

1. By contentment we come to give God the worship due Him.

It is a special part of the divine worship that we owe to God, to be content in a Christian way, as has been shown to you. I say it is a special part of divine worship that the creature owes to the infinite Creator, that I tender the respect due from me to the Creator. The word that the Greeks have that signifies *to worship*, is the same as to come and crouch before another — as a dog might come crouching to you, and be willing to lie down at your feet. So the creature, in apprehending its own baseness, and the infinite Excellency that is in God above it, when it comes to worship God, it comes and crouches to this God; it lies down at His feet. That is when the creature worships God. When you see a dog come crouching to you, and you can make him lie down at your feet by holding your hand over him, then consider that this is what you should do before the Lord. You should come crouching to Him, and lie down at His feet on your backs or bellies — lie down in the dust before him, willing that He do with you what he will. Sometimes you may turn a dog this way or that, up and down with the hand; and there he lies before you, according to what you show him with your hand. So when the creature comes and lies down this way before the Lord, then the creature worships God; you tender that worship that is due to God.

Now in what disposition of heart do we crouch to God this way, more than when we have this contentment in all conditions that God disposes us to? This is crouching to God's disposal: to be like the poor woman of Canaan, who when Christ said, *It is not fitting to give the children's food to dogs*, said, *Even dogs have crumbs* (Mat 15.26-27). I confess I am a dog, yes; but let me have only a crumb. And so, when the soul is in such a disposition as to lie down and say, "Lord, I am but as a dog, yet let me have a crumb," then it highly honors God. It may be that some of you don't have your table spread as others do, but God gives you crumbs. Now says the poor woman, dogs have crumbs. And when you can find your heart subjecting to God in this way, to be but as a dog, and it can be contented and bless God for any crumb, *this* I say, is a great worship of God. You worship God more by this, than when you come to hear a sermon, or spend half an hour or an hour in prayer, or when you come to receive a sacrament. These are the *acts* of God's worship, yes; but they are only *external* acts of worship — to hear and pray and receive sacraments. But this is *soul-worship*: to subject itself to God in this way.

You who often worship God by hearing, and praying, and receiving sacraments, and yet afterwards are froward and discontented — know that God does *not* regard that worship. He will have soul-worship, in subjecting the soul to God. Observe it, I beseech you. It is in *active* obedience that we worship God — by doing what pleases God. But by *passive* obedience we worship God as well — by being pleased with *what God does*. So then, when I perform a duty, I worship God; I do what pleases God. Why would I not as well worship God when I am pleased with what *God* does? As it was said of Christ's obedience, Christ was active in his passive obedience, and passive in his active obedience. So the saints are passive in their active obedience — they are first passive in the reception of grace, and then active. And when they come to passive obedience, they are active — they put forth grace in active obedience. When they perform actions to God, then the soul says, "Oh! that I could do what pleases God!" And when they come to suffer any cross, "Oh! that what God does might please me!" I labor to do what pleases God, *and* I labor that what God does, pleases me. Here is a Christian indeed, who endeavors to do both. So now, this is but one side of a Christian, to endeavor to do what pleases God. You must endeavor as well, to be pleased with what God does. And so you will come to be a complete Christian when you can do both. And that is the first thing in the excellency of this Grace of Contentment.

The Second thing in opening this Excellency of Contentment is that,

2. In contentment there is much exercise of grace.

There is, indeed, much *strength* of grace, and much *beauty* of grace in contentment. So there is much *exercise* of grace, *strength* of grace, and *beauty* of grace. I put all these together.

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(1.) *There is much **exercise** of grace.* There is a composition of grace in contentment — there is faith, and there is humility, and love, and there is patience, and there is wisdom, and there is hope — almost all the graces are compounded. It is an oil that has the ingredients of all kinds of grace. And therefore, though you cannot see the particular grace, yet in this oil you have it all. God sees the graces of his Spirit exercised in a special manner, and this pleases God at the heart, to see the graces of his Spirit exercised. In one action that you do, you may exercise one grace especially; but in contentment, you exercise a great many graces at once.

(2.) *There is a great deal of **strength** of grace in contentment.* It argues for a great deal of strength in the *body* to be able to endure hard weather, and whatever happens, to not be altered by it much. And so it argues for strength of grace, to be *content*. You complain of weakness of memory, or of parts,¹ and you can't do what others do in other things. But do you have this gracious Heart-Contentment that has been revealed to you? I know you've attained strength of grace in this, when it is *spiritual*, in the way that was shown to you in the explication of this point. If a man is distempered in his body, and has many obstructions — say an ill stomach, or his spleen and liver are obstructed — and yet for all this, his brain is not distempered; *that* is an argument for great strength of brain. Though many ill fumes rise from his sickened stomach, his brain is still not distempered; he continues the free exercise of his reason and understanding. Everyone understands that this man has a very strong brain, when such things won't distemper him. Whereas other people who have a *weak* brain, if they digest meat from but one meal, the fumes that arise from their stomach distemper their brain, and make them unfit for anything. You have others who have strong heads and strong brains; though their stomachs are ill, and they can't digest meat, they still have the free use of their brain — *this* argues for strength.

So it is in a man's spirit. You have many who have weak spirits; and if they have any ill fumes — if accidents befall them — you quickly find them out of temper. But you have other men who, though things “fume up,” they keep on in a steady way. They have the use of their reason and of other graces, and they possess their souls with patience.

As I remember, it's reported that the eagle isn't like other fowls. When other fowls are hungry, they make a noise. But the eagle is never heard to make a noise, even if it lacks food. And it's from the magnitude of its spirit, that it won't make the complaints that other fowls do when they lack food. This is because it is *above* hunger, and *above* thirst.

So it is an argument for a gracious magnitude of spirit, that whatever befalls it, it isn't always whining and complaining as others do. Rather, it still goes on in its way and course, and blesses God, and keeps in a constant tenor whatever befalls it. Those things which cause others to be dejected, fretted, and vexed, and take away all the comfort of their lives, make no alteration at all in the spirits of these men and women. I say, *this* is a sign of a great deal of strength of grace.

(3.) *It's also an argument for a great deal of **beauty** of grace.* There was a statement that Seneca once made, who was a heathen:

“When you go abroad into groves and woods, and there you see the tallness of the trees and their shadows, it strikes a kind of awful fear of a Deity in you. And when you see the vast rivers and fountains, and deep waters, that strikes a kind of fear of a God in you. But if you see a man who is quiet in tempests, and who lives happily in the midst of adversities, why don't you worship that man?”

He thinks such a man is to be honored, who is quiet and lives a happy life, though in the midst of adversities. The Glory of God appears here more than in any of His works. There are no works that God has made — the sun, moon, stars and all the world — in which so much of the Glory of God appears, as in a man who lives quietly in the midst of adversity. That's what convinced the

¹ *Parts*: the word can refer to someone's skill or role; but also to intellectual or physical capabilities.

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king when he saw that the three children could walk in the midst of the fiery furnace and not be touched (Dan 3.22f.). The king was mightily convinced by this, that surely their God was a great God indeed; and that they were highly beloved by their God, if they could walk in the midst of the furnace and not be touched — whereas others who came but to the mouth of the furnace were devoured. So it is, when a Christian can walk in the midst of fiery trials and not have his garments singed, but has comfort and joy in the midst of it all. It convinces men, when they see the power of grace in the midst of afflictions. It's like Paul, who could sing while in the stocks; this worked upon the jailor. They can yet behave themselves in a gracious and holy manner, under those afflictions which would make others roar. Oh, *this* is the glory of a Christian.

This is said to be the glory of Christ in Mic 5.5 (for interpreters think it is meant of Christ). *And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian comes into our land, and when he treads in our palaces.* This man shall be the peace when the Assyrian comes into our land. For someone to be in peace when there are no enemies, is no great matter. But the text says, when the *Assyrian* comes into our land, *then* this man shall be the peace. That is, when all is in a hubbub and uproar, even then, this man shall yet be peace. That's the test of grace, when you find that Jesus Christ in your heart is your peace when the Assyrian comes into the land. You may think you find peace in Christ when you have no outward troubles. But is Christ your peace when the Assyrian comes into the land, when the *Enemy* comes? Suppose you hear the enemy come marching into the City, and he has taken the works, and is plundering — what would be your peace? Jesus Christ would be peace to the soul when the enemy comes into the city, and into your houses. If any of you have been where the enemy has come, what has been the peace of your souls? What is said of Christ may be applied to this Grace of Contentment, when the Assyrian, the plunderers, the enemies — when any affliction, trouble, or distress befalls such a heart — then this Grace of Contentment brings peace to the soul. At *that* time is when it brings peace to the soul — when the Assyrian comes into the land. The Grace of Contentment is an excellent grace. There is much beauty, much strength in it; there is a great deal of worth in this grace. And therefore, be in love with it.

The Third thing in the Excellency of Contentment is this:

3. By contentment the soul is fitted to receive mercy — and fourthly, to do service.

I will put these two together: contentment makes the soul fit to receive mercy, *and* to do service. No man or woman in the world is so fit to receive the grace of God, and to do the work of God, as those who have contented spirits.

Those who are contented, are fitted to receive mercy from the Lord. If you would pour liquor into a vessel, you must hold the vessel still. If the vessel moves, and shakes up and down, you cannot pour anything in. You'll say, *Hold still*, that you may pour it in and not lose any. So too, if we would be the vessels to receive God's mercy, and would have the Lord pour his mercy into us, we must have quiet hearts. We must not have our hearts hurrying up and down in trouble, discontent, and vexing; but we must have still and quiet hearts if we would receive mercy from the Lord. If a child flings about and jumps up and down for a thing, you won't give it to him while he cries this way. First you will have the child be quiet. Even though perhaps you intend him to have what he cries for, you won't give it to him till he is quiet, and comes and stands still before you, and is contented *without* it; and then you will give it to him.

And truly, so the Lord deals with us. For our dealings with him are just as your froward children's dealings are with you. As soon as you want a thing from God, if you don't have it, you are quickly disquieted and all in an uproar (as it were) in your spirits. God intends mercy to you, but He says, "You shall not have it yet. I would see you quiet first. And then in the quietness of your heart, come to me and see what I will do with you." I appeal to you, you who are in any way acquainted with the ways of God, haven't you found this to be the way of God towards you? When you've been

troubled for lack of some spiritual comfort, perhaps, and your hearts were vexed at it, you get nothing from God all that while. But now, if you've gotten your heart into a quiet frame, and can say, "Well, it's fitting that the Lord do with his poor creatures what he will. I am under his feet, and I am resolved to do what I can to honor him, and to let Him do with me what He will. I will seek him as long as I live. I will be content with what God gives. And whether he gives it or not, I will be content." God asks, Are you in this frame? If so, then now you will have comfort; now I will give you the mercy.

A prisoner must not think to get his fetter off by pulling and tearing at it. He may gore his flesh and rend it to the very bone — certainly, he won't be unfettered any sooner. If he would have his fetters taken off, he must quietly give himself up to some man to take them off. Say you have a beggar who has knocked once or twice at the door, and you don't come; and he is vexed and troubled at this. He thinks it too much that you let him stand a little while without anything. You would think this beggar isn't fit to receive alms. But if you hear two or three beggars at your door, and you hear them outside your window saying, "Let us be content to wait; perhaps they are busy. It is fitting that we should wait. It will be good if we get *anything* at last, for we deserve nothing at all. And therefore we do well to wait a while;" —you would then quickly send them alms. So God deals with the heart. When it is in a disquieted way, God does not give. But when the heart lies down quietly under God's hand, then the heart is in a fit frame to receive mercy. *Your strength shall be to sit still*, says God (Isa 30.7). You won't be delivered from Babylon except by sitting still.

4. As contentment makes us fit to receive mercy, so it makes us fit to do service.

Oh! the quiet fruits of righteousness, the peaceable fruits of righteousness! Those indeed prosper and multiply most, when they come to be peaceable fruits of righteousness. As the philosophers say of everything that moves, nothing moves except upon something that is immovable. A thing that moves upon the earth, could not move if the earth were not still.

Objection. The ships move upon the sea, and that is not still.

Answer. But the seas move upon that which is still and immovable.

There is nothing that moves unless it has something immovable that upholds it. The wheels in a coach move up and down, but the axletree¹ doesn't move up and down. So it is with the heart of a man. As they say of the Heaven, it moves up and down upon a pole that is immovable, so it is in the heart of a man. If he moves to do service to God, he must have a steady heart within him that must *help* him to move in the service of God. Those who have unsteady, disquieted spirits — which have no steadfastness at all in them — are not fit to do service for God. But those who have steadfastness in their spirits, are men and women fit to do any service. And that's the reason that when the Lord has any great work for one of his servants to do, He usually first quiets their spirits. He brings their spirits into a quiet, sweet frame, to be contented with anything; and *then* he sets them about employment.

The Fifth Excellency is this:

5. Contentment delivers us from an abundance of temptations.

Oh, the temptations that men of discontented spirits are subject to! The Devil loves to fish in troubled waters. That is our proverb about men and women: their disposition is to fish in troubled waters; they say it is good fishing in troubled waters. This is the maxim of the Devil; he *loves* to fish in troubled waters. Wherever he sees the spirits of men and women troubled and vexed, there the Devil comes. He says, "*There is good fishing for me,*" when he sees men and women go about discontented, up and down, and he can get them alone — *then* he comes with his temptations. Will you suffer such a thing, and take such a shifting, indirect way? "Don't you see how poor you

¹ *Axletree*: A dead axle on a carriage or wagon, that has terminal spindles on which the wheels revolve.

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are,” he whispers. “Others are well off; you don’t know what to do for the winter, to provide fuel, and to get bread for you and your children.” And so he tempts them to take unlawful courses. This is the special distemper that the Devil fastens upon when he gets men and women to give up their souls to him; it is upon their discontent. That is the ground of all those who have been witches, and so have given themselves up to the Devil. Their discontent has given rise to it.

And therefore it is noticeable that those the Devil works upon to make them witches, are usually old and melancholy people, women especially; and those of the poorer sort who are discontent at home. Their neighbors trouble them, and vex them, and their spirits are weak, and they cannot bear it. So the Devil fastens his temptations upon that, and draws them to anything. If they are poor, he promises them money; if they have vengeful spirits, he tells them that he will revenge them upon such and such persons. Now, this quiets and contents them.

Oh! there is matter enough for temptation by the Devil, where he meets with a discontented spirit! As Luther says of God, God doesn’t dwell in Babylon, but in Salem (Gen 14.18). *Babylon* signifies confusion, and *Salem* signifies peace. God doesn’t dwell in spirits who are in confusion; rather, He dwells in peaceable and quiet spirits. Oh! if you would free yourselves from temptations, then labor for contentment. It is the peace of God that guards the heart from temptation. I remember reading of one Marius Curio, that when he had bribes sent to him, to tempt him to be unfaithful to his country, he was sitting at home at dinner with a dish of turnips. And they came and promised him rewards. He said, “That man who can be contented with this fare that I have, will not be tempted with your rewards. I thank God, I am content with this fare. And as for rewards, let them be offered to those who cannot be content to dine with a dish of turnips.”

So the truth is — we see it is apparent — that the reason why many betray their trust, as in service to Parliament and the Kingdom, is because they cannot be content in a low condition. Let a man be content to be in a low condition, and to go plainly clothed if God sees fit, and such a man is shot-free (if I may say) from thousands of temptations of the Devil, that prevail against others to the damning of their souls.

Oh, in such times as these, when men are in danger of losing their estates, those who don’t have this grace are in a most lamentable condition. They are in more danger for their souls than they are for their outward estates. You think it is a sad thing to be in danger of your outward estates, that you may lose it all in a night. But if you don’t have this contented spirit within you, you are in more danger of the temptations of the Devil, to be plundered in that way of any good, and to be led into sin. Oh, when men think this way — that they must live as finely as they’re used to — they make themselves a prey to the Devil. But for those who can say, “Let God do with me what he pleases; I am content to submit to His hand in it,” the Devil will scarcely meddle with such men. There was a philosopher who lived on plain fare. And as he was eating herbs and roots, someone said to him, “If you would only please Dionysius,¹ you need not eat herbs and roots.” But he answered, “If you would be content with such plain fare as this, you need not flatter Dionysius.” Temptations will no more prevail over a contented man, than a dart thrown against a bronze wall.

The Sixth Excellency is,

6. *The abundant comforts in a man’s life that contentment will bring.*

Contentment will make a man’s life exceedingly sweet and comfortable, and nothing more so than the Grace of Contentment. I will show how it brings comfort, in several ways.

- (1.) First, what contentment a man has, he has it in a kind of independent way, in not depending on any creature for his comfort.

¹ Dionysius I, known as “the tyrant of Syracuse” (c. 432-367 B.C.), considered the epitome of a despot.

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(2.) *A contented man whose estate is low, if God raises his estate, he has the love of God in it.* And then it's abundantly sweeter than if he had it and his heart was not contented. For it may be that God grants a discontented man his desire, but he cannot say that it is from God's love. If a man has quieted his spirit first, and *then* God grants him his desire, he may have more comfort in it, and more assurance that he has the love of God in it.

(3.) This contentment is a comfort to a man's spirit in this: *that it keeps in his comforts, and keeps out whatever may dampen his comforts or "put out their light."* I may compare this Grace of Contentment to a mariner's lantern.¹ When a mariner is at sea, however much provision he has in his ship, if he is thousands of leagues from land, or on a route that he won't meet with a ship for three or four months, then if he has no lantern in his ship, nor anything by which he can keep a candle lit in a storm, he'll be in a sad condition. He would give a great deal to have a lantern, or something that might serve in its stead. When a storm comes in the night, and he can't have a light above board without it being puffed out at once, his state is very sad. In the same way, many men have the light of comfort when there's no storm; but let any affliction come, any storm be upon them, and their light is immediately puffed out. And what will they do then? When the heart is furnished with this Grace of Contentment, it's the lantern, as it were. It keeps comfort in the spirit of a man, a light in the midst of a storm and tempest. When you have a lantern in the midst of a storm, you can carry light everywhere, up and down the ship, even to the top of the mast if you wish, and yet keep it lit. So the comfort of a Christian may be kept lit, when it is enlivened with the Grace of Contentment. Whatever storms or tempests may come, yet he can keep light in his soul. Oh! this helps your comforts exceedingly much.

Seventhly, there is this Excellency in Contentment:

7. *It fetches comfort from those things we don't really have in our possession.*

Perhaps many who don't have outward things, have more comfort than those who enjoy them. It's like a man distilling herbs. Though he hasn't got the herbs themselves, having the water distilled from them, he may enjoy the benefit of the herbs. So even if a man doesn't have real possession of such an outward estate, an outward comfort, yet by the Grace of Contentment he may fetch it for himself. By the Art of Navigation, we can fetch the riches of the East and West Indies for ourselves. So by the Art of Contentment we may fetch the comfort of any condition for ourselves; that is, we may have that comfort by Contentment, which we would have if we had the thing itself.

There is a notable story for this in Plutarch, in the *Life of Pyrrhus*.² Sineus came to him, and would gladly have him desist from the wars, and not war with the Romans. He says to Pyrrhus, "May it please your Majesty, it is reported that the Romans are very good men of war, and if it please the gods that we overcome them, what benefit will we have from that victory?" Pyrrhus answered him, "We will then conquer the rest of Italy with ease." Says Sineus, "Indeed, what your Grace says is likely. But when we have won Italy, will our wars then end?" Pyrrhus said, "If the gods were pleased that the victory was achieved, the way would then be wide open for us to attain great conquests, for who would not afterwards go into Africa, and so to Carthage?" "But (says Sineus) when we have all in our hands, what will we do in the end?" Then Pyrrhus, laughing, told him again, "We will then be quiet, and take our ease, and make feasts every day, and be as merry with one another as we possibly can." Sineus says, "What now prevents us from being as quiet and merry together, since we now enjoy what we would seek abroad — and without further travel, and trouble, and shedding of blood, and manifest danger?"

Can you not sit down and be merry *now*? A man may think, "If I had such a thing, then I would have another; and if I had that, then I would have more." And what if you got *all* you desire?

¹ A lantern was only partly to see by. Its main purpose was to signal other ships, and to be seen at a distance.

² *Plutarch* was a Greek biographer (c.4 6-120 AD). *Pyrrhus* was King of Epirus; he defeated the Romans in two battles, despite staggering losses (319-272 BC).

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Would you *then* be content? Why, you may be content *now*, even without them. Certainly, our contentment doesn't consist in getting the thing we desire, but in God fashioning our spirits to our conditions. There are some men who don't have a foot of ground of their own, and yet they live better than other men who are heirs to a great deal of land. I have known it in the country sometimes, that a man lives on his own land, and yet he lives very poorly. But you have another man who *rents* his land; and yet by his good husbandry, and by his care, he lives better sometimes than one who has his own land. So by this Art of Contentment, a man may live better *without* an estate, than another man can *from* an estate. Oh! it adds exceedingly to the comfort of a Christian. And that I may show it further, there is more comfort in the Grace of Contentment than there is in any possessions whatsoever. A man has more comfort in being content *without* a thing, than he can have in the thing he desires in a discontented way.

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 froward in other things. If you give children what they want in some things, they grow that much more coy,¹ 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 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. And it's this:

¹ *Coy*: showing false modesty, or hiding the truth (secretive). Children may steal to get what they believe they are entitled to, and then lie about it when confronted. If we spoil them, we tend to feed that sense of entitlement.

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In Heaven there is no overcoming of temptations. Saints *there* aren't put to any trials by affliction. In Heaven they have the exercise of grace, but they have nothing but encouragement to it. And indeed, the grace of those who are there is perfect, and they excel us in that. But there is nothing to cross their grace; they have no trials at all to tempt them to do the contrary.

But for a man or woman *here*, to be in the midst of afflictions, temptations, and troubles, and yet to have grace exercised in the midst of all they suffer — to be satisfied in God and Christ, and in the Word and promises — *this* would seem to be an honor that God has from us here, that He doesn't have from the angels and saints in Heaven.

Is it so much for one who is in Heaven, who has nothing but good from God, who has nothing to test him, no temptations — is it so much for such a person to praise and bless God, as it is for the poor soul here who is in the midst of trials and temptations and afflictions and troubles? For *this* soul to go on praying, and blessing, and serving God, I say, is an excellency that you won't find in Heaven. And God won't have this kind of glory from you in Heaven. And therefore, be contented, and prize this contentment, and be willing to live in this world as long as God pleases. Don't think, "Oh, that I might be delivered from all these afflictions and troubles here in this world!" If you were, then you would have more ease for yourself. But here's a way of honoring God, and manifesting the excellency of grace *here*, when you are in this conflict of temptation, that God won't have from you in Heaven. And therefore, be satisfied and quiet. Be contented with your contentment. Say, "I lack some things that others have, but blessed be God, I have a contented heart that others don't have."

So then, I say be content with your contentment, for that's a rich portion that the Lord has granted you. If the Lord were to give you thousands in this world, it would not be such a rich portion as this: that He has given you a contented spirit. Oh, go away and praise the name of God, and say, "Lord, it is true, these comforts and those comforts that others have, I would be glad if I had them. But you have cut me short. Even though I lack these, yet you have given me that which is as good and better. You have given me a quiet contented heart, to be willing to be at Your disposal."

Sermon 7: The Evils of Discontentment.

at Stepney, Thursday, Sept. 7, 1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

We proceed now. There are two or three more things about the Excellency of Contentment, and then we will proceed to the Application of the Point. The Eighth Excellency is,

8. Contentment is a great blessing of God upon the soul.

There is God's blessing upon those who are content — upon them and their estates, and upon all that they have. We read in Deu 33.7 of the blessing of Judah, the principal tribe: *And he said, hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people; let his hands be sufficient for him, and be a help to him from his enemies.* Let his hands be sufficient for him; that is, bring a sufficiency of all good to him, that he may have of his own. That's the blessing of Judah. So when God gives you a sufficiency of your own, as every contented man has, there is the blessing of God upon you; the blessing of the principal tribe of Judah is upon you. It is the Lord that gives us all things to enjoy. We may have the thing and yet not enjoy it unless God comes in with His blessing. Now, whatever you have, you enjoy it. Many men have estates and don't enjoy them. It's the blessing of God that gives us the enjoyment of all things; it is God who, through His blessing, has fashioned your heart and made it suitable to your condition.

9. Those who are content may expect reward from God.

The Ninth Excellency is that those who are content may expect reward from God, *that God will give them the good of all those things that they are contented to be without.* And this brings an abundance of good to a contented spirit. There is some mercy that you think would be very comfortable for you if you had it. But can you bring your heart to submit to God in it? If so, you will have the blessing of the mercy, one way or another. If you don't have the thing itself in reality, you will have it made up to you one way or another. You will have a Bill of Exchange to receive something in lieu of it. There is no comfort that any soul is content to be without, that the Lord will not give either the comfort, or something in its stead. You will have a reward to your soul for whatever good thing you are content to be without.

You know what the Scripture says of active obedience: the Lord accepts from his servants their *will* for the *deed* (Gen 22.11-12). Though we don't do a good thing, if our hearts are upright, and we have the *will* to do it, we will have the blessing, even if we don't do the thing. You who complain of weakness — that you cannot do as others do, or you cannot do as much service as others do — hear this. If your hearts are upright with God, and you would gladly do the same service that you see others do; and you would count it a great blessing from God, the greatest blessing in the world, if you were able to do as others do; then you may now comfort yourselves with this: that in dealing with God under the Covenant of Grace, you shall have from God the reward of all that you *would* do. Just as a wicked man shall have the punishment for all the sin that he would commit, so you shall have the reward for all the good that you would do.

Now, may not we draw an argument from active obedience to passive? There is good reason why you should expect that God will reward you for all that you are willing to *suffer*, as well as for all that you are willing to *do*. If you are willing to be without such comfort and mercy whenever God sees fit, you will be no loser. Certainly, God will reward you either with the comfort, or with what will be as good to you as the comfort. Therefore consider: How many things do I have that others lack? And can I bring my heart into a quiet, contented frame to lack what others have? I have the blessing of all that they have. I will either possess such things as others have, or else God will make it up to me one way or another, either here, or hereafter in eternity. Oh what riches are here! With contentment you have all kinds of riches.

Tenth and lastly,

10. By contentment the soul comes to an excellency near to God himself.

Indeed, contentment is the nearest we may be to God. For this word translated *content*, is a word that signifies *self-sufficiency*, as I told you when opening the words of Phi 4.11. A contented man is a self-sufficient man. And what is the great glory of God, if not to be happy and self-sufficient in Himself? Indeed, He is said to be *all-sufficient*. But that's just a further addition of the word *all*, rather than an addition of any matter — for to be *sufficient* is to be *all-sufficient*. Now, isn't this the glory of God, to be sufficient? to have sufficiency in himself, *El-Shaddai*, to be God having sufficiency in himself? ¹ And you come near this, you partake of the Divine nature *in general*, by grace. But you partake of it in a more peculiar manner by this grace of *Christian Contentment*. For what is the excellency and glory of God if not this? Suppose there were no creatures in the world, and that all the creatures in the world were annihilated. God would remain the same blessed God that he is now. He would not be in a worse condition if all creatures were gone. Neither would a contented heart be in a worse condition if God were to take away all creatures from him. A contented heart has enough, even in the lack of all creatures; and he would not be more miserable than he is now. Suppose that God were to let you continue here, and all the creatures that are here in this world were taken away. Having God as your portion, you would still be as happy as you are now. And therefore Contentment has a great deal of Excellency in it.

Thus we have shown in many particulars, the excellency of this Grace of Contentment, laboring to present the beauty of it before your souls, that you may be in love with it.

Now, my brethren, what remains but the *practice* of this? For this Art of Contentment is not a speculative thing, only for contemplation; but it is an art of Divinity, and therefore *practical*. You are now to labor to work upon your hearts, so that this grace may be in you, and that you may honor God and honor your profession [of Christ] with this Grace of Contentment. For none more honor God, and honor their profession, than those who have this Grace of Contentment.

The Evils of Discontentment

Now, that we may fall upon the *practice*, it is first required *that we be humbled in our hearts for the lack of this contentment — that we have had so little of this Grace in us*. For there is no way to set about any duty with profit, till the heart is humbled for the prior lack of performing that duty. Therefore that's the thing I will endeavor in the Application, to get your hearts to be humbled for lack of this grace.

“O if I had this Grace of Contentment, what a happy life I might have lived! What an abundance of honor I might have brought to the name of God! And how I might have honored my profession! And what a deal of comfort I might have enjoyed! But the Lord knows it has been far otherwise. Oh, how far I have been from this Grace of Contentment which has been expounded to me! I have had a murmuring, a vexing, and a fretting heart within me. Every little cross has put me out of temper and out of frame. O the boisterousness of my spirit! What a deal of evil God sees in the vexing and fretting of my heart, and in the murmuring and repining of my spirit!”

Oh that God would make you see it! Now, to the end that you might be humbled for the lack of this, I will endeavor to speak of it in these particulars:

First I will set before you *The evil of a murmuring spirit; there is more evil in it than you are aware of*. [this sermon through the 8th sermon]

Secondly, *I will show you some aggravations of this evil*. It's evil in all, but in some of us more than others. [the 9th sermon]

¹ *El Shaddai* is translated *God Almighty*; yet *Almighty* necessarily means not needing anything outside of Himself to accomplish all that He has a will to do — hence, He is *All-Sufficient* in Himself; and indeed, that is His glory.

Thirdly, *I will labor to take away the pleas that any murmuring discontented heart has for this distemper of his.* [from the end of the 9th sermon through the 10th]

There are these three things in the humbling of the soul for the lack of this Grace of Contentment. **Now for the first:** The great evil there is in a murmuring, discontented heart.

1. Your murmuring and discontentedness argues for much corruption in the soul.

Just as contentment argues for much grace, strong grace, and beautiful grace, so murmuring argues for much corruption, strong corruption, and vile corruptions in your heart. As in a man's body, if it is of such a temper that every pin-scratch makes his flesh rankle and be sore, you would say, surely this man's body is *very* corrupt; his blood and his flesh are corrupt if every pin-scratch makes it rankle. So it is in your spirit, if every little trouble and affliction makes you discontented, and makes you murmur, and even causes your spirit within you to rankle. Or it is like a wound in a man's body. The evil of the wound is not so much in how large it is, or the abundance of blood that comes out of the wound, but in the inflammation in it, or in a worrisome and infectious humor [an underlying malady, inclination, or susceptibility] in the wound.

When an unskilled man comes and sees a large wound in the flesh, he looks at it as a dangerous wound; and when he sees a great deal of blood gush out, he thinks these are the evils of it. But when a *surgeon* comes and sees a great gash, he says: "This will be healed within a few days; but there is a lesser wound, with an inflammation or a worrisome humor in it, and this will take time to cure." So that, he doesn't lay balsam and healing salves upon it. Rather, his great care is to get out the worrisome humor or inflammation, and the thing that must heal this wound is some drink to purge it. But the patient says, "What good will this do for my wound? You give me something to drink, but my wound is in my arm, or in my leg. What good will this do that I put in my stomach?" Yes, but it purges out the infection, and takes away the inflammation; and till that is taken away, the salves can do no good.

It is just so, for all the world, in the souls of men. It may be that there is some affliction upon them that I compare to the wound. Now, they think that the greatness of the affliction is what makes their condition most miserable. Oh no; there is a worrisome humor, an inflammation in the heart, a murmuring spirit that is within you, and *that* is the misery of your condition. And *that* must be purged out of you before you can be healed. Let God do with you what he will. Till he purges out that worrisome humor, your wound will not be healed. A murmuring heart is a very sinful heart. So that, when you are troubled by such an affliction, your thoughts should instead be troubled by the murmuring of your heart; for *that* is the greatest trouble. There is an affliction upon you, and yes, that is grievous; but there is a murmuring heart within, and that is *more* grievous. Oh! that we could but convince men and women that a murmuring spirit is a greater evil than any affliction, whatever the affliction may be! We will show more afterward, that a murmuring spirit is the evil of the evil, and the misery of the misery.

The evil of murmuring is such that, when God speaks of wicked men, and describes them, and shows the brand of a wicked and ungodly man or woman,

2. God instances this sin in a more special manner.

I might name many Scriptures, but the one in Jude is a most remarkable one. In Jude 1.14-15, it is said that, *The Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all who are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and all of their harsh speeches, which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.* Note that here in verse 15, mention is made four times of ungodly ones: all who are *ungodly* among them, all their *ungodly* deeds which they have *ungodly* committed, and of all their harsh speeches which *ungodly* sinners have spoken against Him. This is in general. But then in verse 16 he shows who they are in particular: *These are*, he says, *murmurers* — that is the very first. Would you know who these ungodly men are? — those whom God will punish when He comes with ten

thousands of angels; those He will punish for all their ungodly deeds that they do; those who speak ungodly things against Him? These ungodly ones are *murmurers*. In Scripture, murmurers are put in the forefront of *ungodly ones*. It is a most dreadful Scripture, that the Lord, when He speaks of ungodly ones, puts murmurers in the very forefront of all. You need to look to your spirits. You may see that this murmuring, which is the vice *contrary* to this Contentment, is not as small a matter as you think. You think you're not as ungodly as others because you don't swear and drink as others do; but you may be ungodly in murmuring. It's true, there is no sin that doesn't have some seeds and remainders of it in those who are godly. But when men are under the power of this sin of *murmuring*, it convicts them as ungodly, the same as if they were under the power of drunkenness, or whoredom, or any other sin. God will look at you as ungodly for *this* sin as well as for any sin whatsoever. This one Scripture should make the heart quake at the thought of the sin of murmuring.

Just as it is made a brand of ungodly men, so you will find in Scripture that,

3. God counts murmuring as rebellion.

It is contrary to the worship found in contentedness, which is worshipping God by crouching and falling down before him, even as a dog would crouch when you hold a stick over him. But a murmuring heart is a rebellious heart, as you find if you compare two Scriptures together. They are both in the book of Numbers. *But on the morrow*, says Num 16.41, *all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, you have killed the people of the Lord*. They all murmured; now compare this with Num 17.10: *And the Lord said to Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the Testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels*. In the 16th chapter they murmured against Moses and Aaron, and in the 17th chapter we read, *bring the rod of Aaron again before the Testimony for a token against the rebels*. So that, in Scripture, to be a *murmurer*, and to be a *rebel*, is all the same. It is rebellion against *God*, just as it is the beginning of rebellion and sedition in a *kingdom*, when the people are discontented.

When discontent comes, it grows into murmuring. You can go into almost any house where there is murmuring, and the men there will be discontented; and in a little while, that breaks out into sedition or rebellion. Murmuring is but the smoke of a fire: there is first smoke and smoldering before the flame breaks forth. So too, before there is open rebellion in a kingdom, there is first the smoke of murmuring, and then it breaks forth into open rebellion. And because it has the seeds of rebellion in it, it is counted by the Lord as rebellion. Will you be a rebel against God? When you feel your heart discontented and murmuring against the dispensations of God towards you, you should check ¹ it this way: "Oh, you wretched heart! What, will you be a rebel against God? Will you rise in a way of rebellion against the infinite God? Yet, this is what you have done." Charge your heart with this sin of rebellion.

You here, who are guilty of this sin of murmuring, are charged by the Lord this day, as being guilty of rebellion against Him. And God expects that when you go home, you should humble your souls before Him for this sin, that you should charge your souls for being guilty of rebellion against God. Many of you may say, "I never thought that I was a rebel against God before. I thought that I had many infirmities, but now I see the Scripture speaks of sin in another manner than men do. The Scripture makes men (though only murmurers) to be rebels against God. Oh! this rebellious heart that I have against the Lord, that has manifested itself in this way of murmuring against the Lord!" That is a *third* particular in the evil of discontentment.

A *fourth* particular in the evil of discontentment (of murmuring) is this:

¹ *Check*: to confront or block.

4. It is a wickedness which is greatly contrary to grace, and especially contrary to the work of God in bringing the soul home to Himself.

I know no distemper more opposite and contrary to the work of God in the conversion of a sinner, than this.

Question. What is the work of God when he brings a sinner home to Himself?

Answer.

(1.) The usual way is for God to make the soul see and be sensible of the dreadful evil that is in sin, and the great breach that sin has made between God and that soul. For certainly, Jesus Christ can never be known in his beauty and excellency till the soul knows this. I don't speak of what secret work of the Holy Ghost there may be in the soul. But before the soul can actually apply Jesus Christ to itself, it is impossible without coming to know the evil of sin, and the excellency of Jesus Christ. A seed of faith may be put into the soul, but the soul must first know Christ, and know sin, and be made sensible of it. Now, how contrary is this sin of murmuring to any such work of God? Has God made me see the dreadful evil of sin, and made my soul sensible of the evil of sin as the greatest burden? How can I then be so troubled by every affliction? Certainly, if I saw what the *evil* of sin was, the sight of it would swallow up all other *evils*. And if I were *burdened* with the evil of sin, it would swallow up all other *burdens*. "What! am I now murmuring against God's hand? (says such a soul), when just a while ago the Lord made me see myself as a damned wretch, and I apprehended it a wonder that I wasn't in Hell?"

(2.) Yes, it is mightily contrary to the sight of the infinite excellency and glory of Jesus Christ, and the things of the Gospel. "What! am I that soul to whom the Lord has revealed the infinite excellency of Jesus Christ, and yet I think such a little affliction is so grievous to me, when I have had the sight of such glory in Christ as is worth more than ten thousand worlds? (for so a true convert would say). Oh! the Lord at such a time has given me that sight of Christ which I wouldn't be without for ten thousand, thousand worlds." Has God given you that, and will you be discontent for what is a trifle by comparison?

(3.) A third work, when God brings the soul home to Himself, is *taking the heart away from creaturely things — disengaging the heart from all creature-comforts*. That is ordinarily the third work, that the soul may perceive of itself. It is true, God's work may be altogether in the *seeds* in the soul; but in the several *actings* of the soul in turning to God it may perceive these things in it. The disengagement of the heart from the creature; *that* is the calling of the soul from the world. *Whom the Lord has called, He has justified* (Rom 8.30). And what is the calling of the soul if not this? The soul that before was seeking contentment in the world, and clinging to the creature, the Lord now calls out of the world and says, Oh Soul, your happiness is not here; your rest is not here; your happiness is elsewhere; and your heart must be loosened from all these things that are here below in the world. *This* is the work of God in the soul: to disengage the heart from the creature. And how contrary a murmuring heart is to such a thing! You cannot remove one thing that is glued to another; rather, you must tear it. So it is a sign that your heart is glued to the world, that when God would remove you from it, your heart tears. If by an affliction, God were to take anything in the world from you, and you can part from it with ease, without tearing, then it's a sign that your heart is not glued to the world.

(4.) A fourth work of God in converting a sinner is this: *casting the soul upon Jesus Christ for all its good*. I see Jesus Christ in the Gospel as the Fountain of all good; and God out of free grace tendering him to me for life and for salvation. And now my soul casts itself, or rolls itself upon the infinite grace of God in Christ for all its good. Now, have you done so? Has God converted you, and drawn you to his Son, to cast your soul upon him for all your good? And yet, are you discontented for lack of some little matter in a creature comfort? Are you one who has cast your soul upon Jesus Christ for all good? As he says in another case, *Is this your faith?* (Joh 11.26)

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(5.) *The soul is subdued to God.* And then it comes to receive Jesus Christ as a King, to rule, to order and dispose of him however he pleases; and so the heart is subdued to God. Now, how opposite is a murmuring, discontented heart to a heart that is subdued to Jesus Christ as King, and to receiving him as a Lord to rule and dispose of him as He pleases!

(6.) There is in the work of turning to God, *giving yourself up to God in an everlasting covenant.* As you take Christ, the Head of the Covenant, to be yours, so you give yourself up to Christ. In the work of conversion, the soul resigns itself wholly to God in an everlasting covenant to be His. Have you ever surrendered yourself to God in an everlasting covenant? Then certainly this fretting, murmuring heart of yours is mighty opposite to it; certainly, you forget this covenant of yours, and the resignation of yourself to God. It would be a marvellous help to you, to humble your souls when you are in a murmuring condition. If you could but obtain enough liberty of your own spirits, as to look back to see what the work of God was in converting you, nothing would prevail more than to think of that. “I am now in a murmuring, discontented way. But how I felt my soul working when God turned it to Himself! Oh, how opposite *this* is, to *that* work, and how unbecoming!”

Oh, what shame and confusion would come upon the spirits of men and women, if they could but compare the work of corruption in their murmuring and discontent, with the work of God that was upon their souls in conversion! Now, we should labor to keep the work of God upon our souls that was evident at our conversion — for conversion must not be only for an instant, at first. Men are deceived in this, if they think their conversion was only at the start. You must be in a way of conversion to God all the days of your life. And therefore Christ said to his disciples, Mat 18.3, *Unless you are converted and become as little children* — “you are converted.” Why say that? Weren’t they converted before? Yes, they were converted; but they were to *continue* the work of conversion all the days of their lives. What work of God there is at first in conversion, is to abide afterwards. There must always abide some sight and sense of sin. It may be not in the way which you had at first, which was more of a preparation than anything else; but the sight and sense of sin is to continue still. That is, you are still to be sensible of the burden of sin, because it is against the holiness, goodness, and mercy of God to you. And the sight of the excellency of Jesus Christ is to continue; and being called away from the creature; and casting your soul upon Christ; and receiving Christ as King (*you still receive him day by day*); and subduing your heart; and surrendering yourself to God in a way of covenant. Now, if only this were continued daily, there would be no space or time for murmuring to work on your heart. That is the fourth particular.

5. Murmuring and discontent is exceedingly below a Christian.

Oh, it is too mean and base a disorder for a Christian to give way to it. It is below a Christian in many respects.

(1.) *It is below the relation of a Christian,* the relation in which you stand. You may ask, *Which relation?*

1. *The relation in which you stand to God.* Don’t you call God your Father? And don’t you stand in relation to Him as a child? What! do you yet murmur? In 2Sam 13.4 there is a question of Jonadab to Amnon: *Why are you, the king’s son, getting thinner day to day? Won’t you tell me?* And he told him (but it was for a wicked cause). He perceived that his spirit was troubled, for otherwise his body was full and plump. But because of his troubled spirit, he pined away. Why? What’s the matter? You stand in this relation to the King, and yet something troubles your heart? (that’s his meaning). Is there anything that should disquiet your heart while you stand in such a relation to the King, as the King’s son?

So I may ask a Christian: Are you the King’s son, the son or daughter of the King of Heaven, and yet you are so disquieted, and troubled, and vexed at every little thing that happens? It’s as if a King’s son were to cry out that he’s undone for losing a bauble. What an unworthy thing this would be! That’s what you do when you cry out as if you were undone, while yet a *King’s* son.

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You who stand in such relation to God, as to a father — you dishonor your Father in this; as if He didn't have wisdom, or power, or mercy enough to provide for you.

2. *The relation in which you stand to Jesus Christ; you are his spouse.* What! One is married to Jesus Christ, and yet is troubled and discontented? Don't you have enough in Him? Doesn't Christ say to his spouse, as Elkanah said to Hannah: *Am not I better to you than ten sons?* (1Sam 1.8). Doesn't Christ your husband say to you, *Am I not better to you than thousands of riches and comforts, such comforts as you murmur for want of? Hasn't God given you his Son, and will He not with him give you all things?* (Rom 8.32) Has the love of God to you, been to give you his Son in the way of marriage? Why are you discontented and murmuring? Consider your relation to Jesus Christ, as you are a spouse and married to him. His person is yours, as the riches of a husband are the wife's.

Though some husbands are so vile that their wives may be forced to sue for maintenance, certainly Jesus Christ will never deny maintenance to his spouse. It's a dishonor for a husband to have his wife whining up and down. What! you are matched with *Christ* and you are his spouse, and will you murmur now, and be discontented in your spirit? You will observe among those who are newly married, when there is discontent between the wife and the husband, their friends will shake their heads say, They don't find what they expected. You see after they were married, how the man looks, and the woman looks — they aren't as cheery as they used to be. Surely (they say) it is likely to prove a bad match. But it is not so here; it shall not be so between you and Christ. Oh, Jesus Christ doesn't love to see his spouse have a falling countenance. No man loves to see discontent in his wife's face; and surely Christ doesn't love to see discontent in the face of *His* spouse.

3. *You stand in relation to Christ not only as a spouse, but as a member.* You are *bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.* And to have a member of Jesus Christ be in such a condition of discontentment is exceedingly unworthy.

4. *He is likewise your elder brother, and so you are a co-heir with him.* (Rom 8.17)

5. *The relation in which you stand to the Spirit of God.* You are the temple of the Holy Ghost; He is your Comforter. He is the one appointed to convey all comfort from the Father and the Son, to the souls of his people. Are you the temple of the Holy Ghost, and does He dwell in you, and yet despite all that, you murmur about every little matter?

6. *The relation in which you stand to the angels.* You are made one body with them, for so Christ has joined principalities and powers with his Church. They are ministering spirits for good to His people, to supply what they need. You and they are joined together, and Christ is the Head of you and angels.

7. *The relation in which you stand to the saints.* You are of the same body with them. You and they make up but one mystical body with Jesus Christ. If *they* are happy, you must be happy.

Oh, how beneath a Christian is a murmuring spirit, if he considers his relations in which he stands!

(2.) A Christian should consider that *murmuring and discontentedness are below the high dignities that God has put upon him.* Just consider the high dignity which God has put upon you. The lowliest Christian in the world is a Lord of Heaven and earth. He has made us Kings unto himself, Kings unto God — no, not Kings unto men to rule over them; and yet I say, every Christian is Lord of Heaven and earth, even of life and death. That is, as Christ is Lord of all, so he has made those who are his members to be Lords of all. *All are yours*, says the Apostle, even life and death; *everything* is yours (1Cor 3.22). It is a very strange expression, that death should be theirs — *death is yours*; that is, you are lords over it, as it were. You have what makes death your servant, your slave, even death itself. Your greatest enemies are turned to be your slaves. Faith makes a

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Christian as Lord over all, to be lifted up in excellency above all creatures that God ever made, except the angels (Psa 8.5) — though in some respect, above them too (Heb 1.4).

I say, the poorest Christian who lives, is raised to a position above all creatures in the world, except angels; and yes, above them in various respects too — and yet you're discontented? That you, who were like a firebrand plucked from hell (Amo 4.11), and might have been scorching, and yelling, and roaring there to all eternity — that God should yet raise you to have a higher excellency in you than there is in all the works of creation that He ever made, except angels, and other Christians who are in your condition! Indeed, you are nearer the Divine nature than the angels, because your nature is joined in a hypostatic union to the Divine nature.¹ And in that respect, your nature is more honored than the nature of the angels. *And the death of Christ is yours.* He died for *you*, and not for the angels (Heb 2.16). And therefore you are like to be raised above the angels in various respects. Yes, you are in such an estate as this; you who are set apart to the end that God might manifest to all eternity, what the infinite power of a Deity is able to raise a creature to. For that is the position of a saint, a believer. His condition is such that he is set apart to the end that God might manifest to all eternity what His infinite power is able to do to make the creature happy.

Are you in such a condition? Oh, then how low and beneath this condition is a murmuring and discontented heart, for want of some outward comforts here in this world! How unseemly it is that you should be a slave to every cross, that every affliction is be able to say to your soul, "Bow down to us"! We counted it a great slavery when men said to our souls, "Bow down," as the cruel prelates were prone to do in imposing things on men's consciences. In effect they said, "Let your consciences, your souls, bow down to us, that we may tread upon them." That is the greatest slavery in the world, that one man should say to another, "Let your consciences, your souls, bow down, that we may tread upon them." And yet, will you allow every affliction to say, "Bow down that we may tread upon you?" Truly it is so, when your heart is overcome with murmuring and discontent. Know that those afflictions which have caused you to murmur, have said to you, "Bow down that we may tread upon you." Indeed, it isn't afflictions, but the very Devil prevails against you in this. Oh! how this is beneath the happy estate that God has raised a Christian to! What! the son of a King; and will he let every base fellow come and bid him to bow down, that he may tread upon his neck? Yet you allow this in every affliction: the affliction, the cross, the trouble that befalls you, says, "Bow down that we may come and tread upon you."

(3.) *Murmuring is below the spirit of a Christian.* Below His spirit, the spirit of every Christian should be like the spirit of his Father. Every father loves to see his *spirit* in his child, loves to see his image — not the image of his body only, to say here is a child for all the world like his father — but he has the *spirit* of his father too. A father who is a man of spirit, loves to see his spirit in his child, rather than the features of his body. Oh, the Lord who is our Father loves to see his Spirit in us. Great men love to see great spirits in their children; and the great God loves to see a great spirit in His children. We are one spirit with God and with Christ, and one spirit with the Holy Ghost. Therefore, we should have a spirit that might manifest the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in our spirits; that is, the spirit of a Christian indeed.

The spirit of a Christian should be a Lion-like spirit. As Jesus Christ is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev 5.5), so we should manifest something of the Lion-like spirit of Jesus Christ. He manifested his Lion-like spirit in passing through all afflictions and troubles whatsoever, without any murmuring against God. When he came to drink that bitter cup, and even the dregs of it, he prayed to God (indeed) that if it were possible, it might pass from him. But immediately: *Not my will, but your will be done* (Luk 22.42). As soon as he mentioned the cup passing from him — though it was the most dreadful cup ever drunk since the world began — at the very mention of it

¹ The hypostatic union, "of one substance with the Father," describes the dual nature of Christ, both divine and human — not two natures, but one — truly God and truly Man at once. Being united to Christ by faith, we become one with the Father and the Son (Joh 17.21-22), but only as we are "in Christ," with Him as our Head and Mediator. — WHG

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he says, *Not my will, but your will be done*. Here Christ showed a Lion-like spirit in going through all kinds of afflictions whatsoever, without any murmuring against God. Now, a murmuring spirit is a base, dejected spirit; it is cross and contrary to the spirit of a Christian, and *very* base.

I remember the heathens counted it very base. Plutarch reports a certain people who manifested their disdain for men who were overly dejected by any affliction. They condemned them to this punishment: to wear women's clothes all their days; or at least they would go about in women's clothes for a certain space of time. It was a token of shame and disgrace to them, because they had such effeminate spirits. They thought it was against a manly spirit; and therefore, seeing that they had un-manned themselves, they should go about as women. Now, will *they* count it an unmanly spirit to be overly dejected in afflictions, and will a *Christian* not count it an unchristian-like spirit to be overly dejected by any affliction?

I remember someone else compares murmuring spirits to children when they are weaning. What a great stir you have with your children when you wean them! How obstinate and vexing they are! So when God would wean you from some outward comforts in this world, oh, how fretful and discontented you are! Children won't sleep, nor let their mothers sleep, when they are weaning. So when God would wean us from the world, and we fret, vex, and murmur, this is a *childish* spirit.

(4.) *It is below the profession of a Christian*. The profession of a Christian — what is that? A Christian's profession is to be dead to the world, and to be alive to God. *That* is his profession — to have his life hidden with Christ in God; to satisfy himself in God. What! Is this *indeed* your profession? And yet if you don't have everything you want, you murmur and are discontent? In doing that, you *deny* your profession.

(5.) *It is below that special grace of faith*. Faith is what overcomes the world; it makes all the promises of God ours. Now, when you took upon yourself the profession of religion, did God ever promise you that you would live at ease, and quiet, and have no trouble? I remember Augustine has a similar expression: "What! is *this* your faith? Did I ever promise you that you would flourish in the world? Are you a Christian to that end? And is *this* your faith? I never made any such promise to you when you took it upon yourself to be a Christian." Oh, it is very contrary to your profession. You have no promise for this, that you would not have such an affliction upon you.

And a Christian should *live by his faith*. It is said that *the just shall live by faith*. Now, you shouldn't look after any other life, but the life that you have by faith. You have no ground for your faith believing that you should be delivered out of such an affliction. Why then should you count it such a great evil to be under this affliction? Certainly that good which we have in the ground for our faith, is enough to content our hearts here, and to all eternity.

A Christian should be satisfied with what God has made *the object of his faith*. The object of his faith is high enough to satisfy his soul, were it capable of a thousand times more than it is. Now, if you may have the object of your faith fully, then you have enough to content your soul. And know that when you are discontented for lack of some comforts, you should think this way: God never promised me that I would have *these comforts*, at *this time*, and in *such a way* as I would have them. I am discontented only because I don't have these things which God never promised me. And therefore I sin greatly against the Gospel, and against the Grace of Faith.

There is yet another thing. *It's below the hope of Christians*: Oh! below the most glorious things that the Saints hope for.

And it is *against the helps that Christians have*; Christians have great helps that may help them against murmuring. And it is *against what God expects from Christians*. God expects another manner of things from them than this. Yes, and it is *below what God indeed has from other Christians*. These things I will open at another time.

Sermon 8: The Evils of Discontentment (cont'd).

at Stepney, Thursday, Sept. 14, 1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

I mentioned various things the last day, to set out the evil of discontent. I will name two or three more. It is below a Christian in these:

(6.) *It is below those helps that a Christian has more than others.* They have the promises to help them, which others don't have. It is not much for a Nabal to have his heart sink because he has nothing but the creature to uphold him. But it is much for a Christian to have his heart sink, who has the promises and ordinances to uphold his spirit — which others don't have.

(7.) *It is below the expectation that God has of Christians.* For God expects not only that they be patient in afflictions, but that they rejoice and triumph in them. Now Christians, when God expects this from you, and you haven't so much as attained to contentedness under afflictions — Oh! this is beneath God's expectation of you.

(8.) *It is below what God has had from other Christians.* Others have not only been contented with little crosses, but they've triumphed over great afflictions. They have suffered the spoiling of their goods with joy. Read but the latter part of Hebrews eleven and you will find what great things God has had from his people. Therefore, not to be content with smaller crosses, must be a great evil.

The sixth evil that there is in a murmuring spirit is this:

6. By murmuring, you undo your prayers.

Murmuring is exceedingly contrary to the prayers you make to God. When you come to your prayer to God, you acknowledge His sovereignty over you. You come there to profess that you are at God's disposal. What else do you pray for, except to acknowledge that you are at His disposal, and that you will stand at his disposal (as it were)? Never come to petition Him, if you would yet be your own carver. You would go contrary to your prayers, to beg for bread at your Father's gates every day, and yet do what you wish. *This is the undoing of the prayers of a Christian.* I remember reading of Latimer, speaking about Peter's denial of his Master. He said, "Peter forgot his Paternoster, ¹ for that was, *Hallowed be your name, and your kingdom come.*" So we may say, when you have murmuring and discontented hearts, you forget your prayers; you forget what you have prayed for. For you must make the Lord's Prayer a pattern for your prayers. Though you don't always say the same words, what do you pray if not, *Give us this day our daily bread?* For that's Christ's intention, that we should have it as a pattern and a directory (as it were) for how to make our prayers. Now, God doesn't teach any of you to pray, *Lord, give me so much a year, or Let me have this kind of cloth, or so many dishes at my table.* Christ doesn't teach you to pray this way. Rather, he teaches us to pray, *Lord, give us our bread,* showing that you should be content with a little. What, don't you have bread to eat? I hope there are none of you here, who don't have that.

Objection. But I don't know what would become of my children if I were to die. Or, if I have bread now, I don't know where I will get it next week; or where I will get provision for the winter.

Answer. Where did Christ teach us to pray, *Lord, give us provision for so long a time?* No, but if we have bread *for this day*, Christ would have us be content. Therefore, when we murmur because we don't have as much variety as others have, we "forget our Paternoster" (as it were). It goes against our prayers. In the way we live, we don't hold forth the same acknowledgment of the

¹ *Paternoster*: The Lord's Prayer, so called because the Latin version begins, Pater noster (Our Father).

Sovereignty of God over us, that we seem to acknowledge in our prayers. Therefore, when at any time you find your hearts murmuring, then reflect upon yourselves, and think this way: “Is this according to my prayers, in which I held forth the Sovereign Power and Authority that God has over me?”

The seventh thing that I add for the evil of discontentment is,

7. *The woeful effects that come to a discontented heart from murmuring.*

I will name you five evil effects that come from a murmuring spirit:

(1.) *You come to lose a great deal of time.* How many times do men and women, when they are discontented, let their thoughts run? They are musing and contriving through their present discontentedness, letting their discontented thoughts work in them for some hours together; and they spend this time in vain! When you are alone, you should spend your time in holy meditation; instead, you are spending your time in discontented thoughts. You complain that you cannot meditate, you cannot think on good things — that if you begin to think of them a little, soon your thoughts are off of them. But if you're discontented with anything, *then* you can go alone, and muse, and readily roll things up and down in your thoughts to feed that discontented humor. Oh, labor to see this evil effect of murmuring — the losing of your time.

(2.) *It unfits you for duty.* A man or woman who is in a contented frame, may be turned to any thing at any time; they are fit to go to God at any time. But when someone is in a discontented condition, he is exceedingly unfit for the service of God. It causes many distractions in your duty, it unfits you for duty — when you come to perform your duties, Oh, the distractions you have if your spirits are discontented! When you hear of any bad news from the sea and cannot bear it, or bad news from a friend, or any loss or cross, Oh, what distractions they cause in the performance of your holy duties! When you should be enjoying communion with God, you are distracted by your thoughts about the cross that has befallen you. Whereas, if you had a quiet spirit, even though great crosses befall you, they would never hinder you in the performance of any duty.

(3.) Consider what *wicked risings of heart, and resolutions of spirit* there are, many times, in a discontented fit.¹ In some discontented fits, the heart rises against God and against others; and sometimes it even has desperate resolutions about what to do to help itself. If the Lord allowed you to do what you sometimes thought to do in a discontented fit, what wretched misery you would have brought upon yourselves! Oh, it was a mercy of God that stopped you. If God had not stopped you, but let you go on when you thought to help yourselves this way or that, Oh, it would have gone badly with you. Just remember those risings of heart and wicked resolutions that you sometimes had in a discontented mood, and learn to be humbled upon that.

(4.) *Unthankfulness.* This is an evil and a wicked effect which comes from discontent. The Scripture ranks unthankfulness among very great sins. Men and women who are discontented, though they enjoy many mercies from God, yet they are thankful for none of them. For this is the vile nature of discontent: to lessen every mercy of God, to make those mercies they have from God as *nothing* to them, because they cannot have what they want.

Sometimes it's this way even in spiritual things. If they don't have all they would have, all the comforts they want, then what they have is nothing to them. Do you think that God will take this well? If you gave a friend or relative a purse of money to go and trade with, and he came to you and said, “What are you giving me? These are but a few bits. They won't do me any good.” — you couldn't bear this from him if he said so, just because he didn't get as much money as he wanted.

So, for you to be ready to say, “All that God has given to me is worth nothing; it will do me no good; they're but a few bits ” — even though they are the precious Graces of God's Spirit, worth

¹ *Fit*: a display of bad temper.

Sermon 8: The Evils of Discontentment (cont'd).

more than thousands of worlds. For you to say they are nothing, they are but common gifts, and all is done in hypocrisy, all counterfeit — Oh! what an unthankful thing this is! The Graces of God's Spirit are nothing to a discontented heart that doesn't have all it would have. And so, for outward blessings, even though God has given you a healthy body, and strength, and has given you some competence for your family, some means of livelihood, yet because you are disappointed in something you would have, therefore all is nothing to you — Oh, what *unthankfulness* is here!

God expects that every day you should spend some time in blessing His name for whatever mercy He has granted to you. There isn't one of you in the lowest condition, that you don't have an abundance of mercies to bless God for; but discontentedness makes them nothing. I remember an excellent saying that Luther has. He says,

“This is the rhetoric of the Spirit of God, to mitigate evil things, and amplify good things: if a cross falls out, to make the cross be but little; but if there is a mercy, to make the mercy be great.”

Thus, if there is a cross, and if the Spirit of God prevails in the heart, such a man or woman will wonder that it isn't greater, and will bless God that even though there is such a cross, it is no more. That's the work of the Spirit of God. And if there is mercy, he wonders at God's goodness, that He granted so great a mercy. The Spirit of God mitigates evils and crosses, and magnifies and amplifies all mercies; He makes all mercies seem to be great, and all afflictions to be little.

But the Devil goes quite contrary; his rhetoric is quite otherwise. He lessens God's mercies, and amplifies evil things. So a godly man wonders at his cross that it isn't more; a wicked man wonders that his cross is so much: Oh, he says, none was ever so afflicted as I am! If there is a cross, the Devil puts the soul to musing upon it, and making it greater than it is; and so it brings discontent. And then, on the other side, if there is mercy, it's the rhetoric of the Devil to lessen the mercy. Yes, indeed, he says, the thing is a good thing, but what is it after all? It is no great matter — and for all this, I may *still* be miserable. Thus the rhetoric of Satan lessens God's mercies, and increases afflictions.

I will give you a striking example of this, which we find in Scripture. It's the example of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, in Num 16.12-13: *And Moses sent to call Dathan, and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, who said, We will not come up: Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land that flows with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, unless you make yourself altogether a prince over us?* Note that they slighted the Land they were going to, the Land of Canaan. *That* was the land God promised them would flow with milk and honey.

But mark here their discontentedness because they met with some troubles in the wilderness: Oh! it was to slay them. They made their affliction in the wilderness to be greater than it was. Oh! it was to kill them, though indeed it was to carry them to the land of Canaan. But now, even though their deliverance from Egypt was a great mercy, they made it out to be nothing. For they say, *You have brought us out of a land that flows with milk and honey* — what land was that? It was the Land of Egypt, the Land of their *bondage*. But they call it a land that flows with milk and honey — though it was the land of their most cruel and unbearable bondage. They should have blessed God as long as they lived, for delivering them out of the land of Egypt. Instead, upon meeting with some cross, they make out their deliverance from Egypt to be no mercy at all. No, it was rather a misery to them to be delivered. Oh (they say), Egypt was a land that flows with milk and honey. Oh, what *baseness* there is in a discontented spirit!

A discontented spirit, out of envy toward God's grace, would make mercies that are great, to be little, or none at all. Would one ever have thought that such a word would come from the mouth of an Israelite who had been under bondage, and cried under it? And yet when they meet with a little cross in their way, to say, *You have brought us out of the land that flows with milk and honey*; to say they were better before than now. And yet before, they couldn't be contented either. This is the usual, unthankful expression of a discontented heart.

And so it is now with us, that when we meet with any cross in our estates, any taxations and trouble, especially if any among you have been where the enemy has prevailed, you are ready to say, "We had plenty before, and we are now brought to a condition of hardship. We were better before, when we had the Prelates and others to domineer." By doing so, we endanger ourselves to be brought back into that bondage. Oh! let us take heed of this, of a discontented heart. There is this woeful cursed fruit of discontent: to make men and women unthankful for all the mercies that God has granted to them; and this is a sore and grievous evil.

(5.) And lastly, there's this evil effect in murmuring: *it causes shiftings of spirit*. Those who murmur and are discontent, are liable to temptations — to shift for themselves ¹ in sinful and ungodly ways. Discontent is the ground of shifting courses, and unlawful ways. How many of you have your consciences condemn you for this, that in the time of your afflictions you have sought to shift for yourselves by ways that were sinful against God, and your discontent was the bottom and ground of it? If you would avoid shifting for yourselves by wicked ways, then labor to mortify this sin of discontent, and to mortify it at the root.

8. There is a great deal of folly, extreme folly, in a discontented heart; it's a foolish sin.

I will open the folly of it in many particulars.

(1.) *It takes away the present comfort of what you have, because you don't have something you want*. What a foolish thing this is — that because I don't have what I want, I won't enjoy the comfort of what I do have! Don't you count this as folly in your children? You give them some food and they're not contented. Perhaps they say it's not enough; so they cry for more. And if you don't immediately give them more, they throw away what they have. Though you count it as folly in your children, yet you deal this way with God. God gives you many mercies, but you see that others have more mercies than you, and therefore you cry for more. Yes, but God doesn't give you what you want. And because of that, you throw away what you have. Isn't this folly in your hearts? It is *unthankfulness*.

(2.) There is great folly in discontentment, for *you cannot help yourselves by all your discontent*; you cannot get anything by it. *Who, by worrying, can add one cubit to his stature* (Mat 6.27), or turn one hair from white to black? You may vex and trouble yourselves, but you get nothing by it. Do you think that the Lord will come in mercy one whit sooner because of the murmuring of your spirits? Oh no. Rather, mercy will be deferred longer for it. Though the Lord was in a way of mercy before, this disorder of your hearts is enough to put Him out of his course of mercy. And though He had thoughts that you should have the thing before, yet now you shall not have it. If you had a mind to give something to your child, but you see him in a discontented, fretting way, you won't give it to him. And this is the very reason so many mercies are denied to you — because of your discontentment. You are discontented for lack of them; and therefore you don't have them. You deprive yourselves of the enjoyment of your own desires, because of the discontentment of your hearts — because you don't have your desires. And isn't this a foolish thing?

(3.) There is a great folly in this, that *commonly there are many foolish carriages* ² *that a discontented heart is guilty of. They carry themselves foolishly towards God, and towards men*. There are such expressions and such behaviors coming from them, that many times they make their friends ashamed of them. Their carriages are so unseemly, they are a shame to themselves and their friends.

¹ *Shift for themselves*: to make their own arrangements, using their own devices.

² *Carriage*: your demeanor; a characteristic way of bearing your body (walking or standing arrogantly and proud, or humble and reserved, etc.). This reflects your attitude towards God and others.

Sermon 8: The Evils of Discontentment (cont'd).

(4.) *Discontent and murmuring eats out the good and sweetness of a mercy before it comes.* If God were to give a mercy that we are discontented for the want of, the blessing of the mercy is, as it were, eaten out before we come to have it. Discontent is like a worm that eats the meat out of the nut; and when the meat is eaten out, all you have left is the shell. If a child were to cry for a nut that has the meat eaten out, or it's all worm-eaten, what good would the child have by having the nut? So is such an outward comfort that you would gladly have, but you're troubled by the lack of it. The very trouble of your spirits is the worm that eats out the blessing of the mercy; and then perhaps God gives it to you. But He gives it with a curse mixed with it, so that you were better off *not* having it, than having it. That man or woman who is discontented for lack of some good thing, if God gives them that good thing before they are humbled for their discontent, they can have no comfort from the mercy; it will be an evil rather than a good thing to them. And therefore, for my part, if I had a friend or brother, or someone who was as dear to me as my own soul, and I see them discontented for the lack of such a comfort, I would rather pray,

“Lord, keep this thing from them, till you are pleased to humble their hearts for their discontent; let them not have the mercy till they come to be humbled for their discontent for the lack of it. For if they have it before that time, they will have it without any blessing.”

And therefore, it should be your care, when you find your hearts discontented for the lack of anything, to be humbled for it, thinking this way to yourselves:

“Lord, if what I so immoderately desire were to come to me before I am humbled for my discontent for lack of it, I am certain I could have no comfort from it; but rather, it would be an affliction to me.”

There are many things which you desire as much as your lives; you think you would be happy if you had them. Yet when they come, you don't find such happiness in them, but they prove to be the greatest crosses and afflictions to you that you ever had. And that is upon this ground: because your hearts were immoderately set upon them before you had them. This is how it was with Rachel: she must have children or else she dies (Gen 30.1). Well, said God, seeing that you must, you shall have them. But though she had a child, she died according to what she said, *Give me children or else I die* (Gen 35.18). So it is in regard to any other outward comforts. People may have the thing, but often it proves to be the heaviest cross they ever had in all their lives.

For example, say that you now have a child that you were discontented for not having before. Maybe it's sick, and your heart is out of temper for fear that you'll lose it. God restores the child, but he restores it in such a way that He makes it a cross to your heart all the days of your life.

One man observes, concerning manna, that when the people were contented with their allowance that God allowed them, it was very good. But when they weren't content with God's allowance, and gathered *more* than God allowed, the text says there were worms in it (Exo 16.20). So it is when we are content with our conditions, and with what God disposes for us. There is a blessing in it, and it is sweet to us. But if we must have *more*, or we keep it *longer* than God would have, there will be worms in it, and it will be no good at all.

(5.) *It makes our affliction a great deal worse than it would be otherwise.* It in no way removes our afflictions; indeed, while they continue, they are a great deal worse and heavier. For a discontented heart is a proud heart; and a proud heart won't pull down his sails when there's a tempest and storm. If a mariner should be froward and not pull down his sails because he's discontented with the storm, is his condition any better? Will this help him? It is just so for all the world, with a discontented heart. A discontented heart is a proud heart, and out of his pride, he is troubled by his affliction, and not contented with God's disposal. And so he won't pull down his spirit at all, and make it bow to God in this condition into which God has brought him. Now, is his condition any better for not pulling down his spirit? No. Certainly, it is abundantly *worse*. It's a thousand to one that the tempest and storm will overwhelm his soul.

And thus you see what a great deal of folly there is in the sin of discontentment.

9. *There's a great deal of danger in the sin of discontentment, for it exceedingly provokes the wrath of God.*

It is a sin that much provokes God against His creature. We find the saddest expressions in Scripture, and examples too, of how God has been provoked against many for their discontent. In Num 14.26, you have a notable text, and one would think it was enough to forever make you fear murmuring. It is said, *The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying — what did he say? — How long shall I bear with this evil congregation which murmurs against me?* How long shall I bear with them? says God, *this evil congregation*. Oh it's an evil congregation that murmurs against me, and how long shall I bear with them? They murmur, and they *have* murmured; as those who have murmuring spirits, and murmuring dispositions, they will murmur *again*, and *again*. *How long shall I bear with this evil congregation that murmurs against me?*

How justly God may say this about many of you who are before the Lord this morning: How long shall I bear with this wicked man or woman who murmurs against me, and has usually murmured against me in the course of their lives, when anything falls out otherwise than they would have it? And mark what follows after, *I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel*. You murmur, and maybe others don't hear you. It may be that you don't speak at all, or only half-words. Yet God hears the language of your murmuring hearts, and those muttering speeches, and those half-words that come from you. And observe further in this verse, how the Lord repeats this sin of murmuring,

How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which *murmurs* against me?
Secondly, I have heard their *murmuring*.
Thirdly, which they *murmur* against me.

Murmur, murmur, murmur — three times in one verse he repeats it, and this is to show His indignation against the thing. When you express indignation against a thing, you repeat it again and again. Now the Lord repeats it again, and again, because He would express his indignation against this sin. And it follows in the 28th verse, *Say to them, As truly as I live, says the Lord, as you have spoken in my ears, so I will do to you*. Note that God swears against a murmurer. Sometimes in your discontent you're ready to swear, maybe. *Do you swear in your discontent?* — So God swears against you for your discontent. And what was it that God would do to them? Verses 29,30, *Doubtless your carcasses will fall in the wilderness; and you shall not come into the land which I swore to make you dwell in*. It is as if God said, If I have any life in me, your lives shall go for it — as I live, it shall cost you your lives. A discontented, murmuring fit of yours may cost you your lives. You see how it provokes God. There is more evil in it than you are aware of. It may cost you your lives, and therefore look to yourselves, and learn to be humbled at the very beginnings of such distempers in the heart. So too in Psa 106.24-25: *Yes, they despised the pleasant land; they didn't believe His word, but murmured in their tents, and didn't hearken to the voice of the Lord. Therefore He lifted up his hand against them to overthrow them in the wilderness*. There are several things to be observed in this Scripture.

First, what we spoke of before, how a murmuring heart *slights* God's mercies. So it is here: *They despised the pleasant land*. And that a murmuring heart is contrary to faith: *they didn't believe His word, but* (says the text) *they murmured in their tents, and didn't hearken to the voice of the Lord*. Many men and women will hearken to the voice of their own base murmuring hearts, who will not hearken to the voice of the Lord. If you would only hearken to the voice of the Lord, there wouldn't be such murmuring as there is.

But mark what follows upon it. You may not think to please yourselves in your murmuring discontentedness, and yet think no evil will come of it: *Therefore He lifted up his hand against them to overthrow them*. You who are discontented lift up your hearts against God; and you cause

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God to lift up His hand against you. Perhaps God lays his finger upon you softly, in some afflictions that are upon you in your families or elsewhere. And yet you cannot bear the hand of God that lies upon you as tenderly as a tender-hearted nurse lays her hand upon a child. You cannot bear the tender hand of God upon you in a lesser affliction; but it would be just for God to lift up his hand against you in another kind of affliction. Oh! a murmuring spirit provokes God exceedingly.

There is another place in Numbers 16, verses 41 and 46. Compare the two verses: *But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, You have killed the people of the Lord;* then mark in the 46th verse: *And Moses said to Aaron, Take a censer and put fire in it from off the altar, and put on incense; and go quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone out from the Lord; the plague has begun.* Mark how God's wrath is kindled. In the 41st verse, the congregation had murmured, and they murmured only against Moses and Aaron (perhaps you murmur more directly against God); but in murmuring against God's ministers, that murmuring was against God. It was against God, but not so directly. If you murmur against those whom God makes His instruments, because you haven't got everything you would have — against the Parliament, or those who are public instruments — it is against God. It was only against Moses and Aaron that the Israelites murmured. They said that Moses and Aaron had killed the people of the Lord; yet it was the hand of God that was upon them for their former wickedness in murmuring. It is usual for wicked, vile hearts to deal this way with God, when His hand is upon them a little: to murmur again and again, and so bring upon themselves infinite kinds of evils.

But now the anger of God was quickly kindled: Oh, says Moses, Go! Take the censer quickly, for wrath has gone out from Jehovah; the plague has begun. So while you are murmuring in your families, the wrath of God may quickly go out against you. In a morning or evening when you are murmuring, the wrath of God may come quickly upon your families or persons. You are never so prepared for present wrath, as when you are in a murmuring discontented fit. Those who stand by and see you in a murmuring discontented fit, have cause to say, Oh! let us go and take the censer — let us go to prayer — for we are afraid that wrath has gone out against this family, against this person. And it would be a very good thing for you who are a godly wife, when you see your husband come home and start murmuring because things are not going according to his desire — to go to prayer, and say, Lord, pardon the sin of my husband. And so too, for a husband to go to God in prayer, falling down and beseeching Him that wrath may not come against his family for the murmuring of his wife.

The truth is, at this day there has been (at least lately) as much murmuring in England as there ever was; and even in this very particular, that the plague has begun. This very judgment comes, many times, upon murmuring, upon those who are so discontented in their families — always grumbling and murmuring at anything that falls out amiss. I say, this text of Scripture in Numbers clearly holds forth that the Lord brings the plague upon men for this sin of murmuring. He does it in kingdoms, and families, and upon particular persons. Though we cannot always point out the particular sin that God brings it for, yet we should examine how far we are guilty of the sin of murmuring. This is because the Scripture holds this forth so clearly, that when Moses but heard they murmured — Do they murmur? Go forth quickly and seek to pacify the anger of God — (he says) *for wrath has gone out, and the plague has begun.*

And in 1Cor 10.10 you have a notable example of God's heavy displeasure against murmuring: *Neither murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer.* Take heed of murmuring as some of them did — he speaks of the people of Israel in the wilderness — for, he says, what came of it? *They were destroyed by the destroyer.* Now, the destroyer is thought to be the fiery serpents that were sent among them. They murmured, and God sent fiery serpents to sting them. What! do you think that such a cross and affliction sting you? Perhaps such an affliction is now upon you, and it seems to be grievous for the present. What! do you murmur and

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repine? God has greater crosses to bring upon you. Those people who murmur for the lack of outward comforts, for lack of water (sometimes), and for lack of bread — they murmur, but the Lord sends fiery serpents among them.

I may say to a murmuring heart, *Woe to you who strive with your Maker!* Woe to that man, that woman, who strives against their maker! And what else are you doing, if not striving against your Maker? Your Maker has absolute disposal of you, and will you strive against your Maker? What does this murmuring discontented heart of yours do, if not wrangle, and contend, and strive even with God himself? Oh! woe to him who strives against his Maker! I may further say to you, as God said to Job when he was impatient (Job 38.1-2): *Now God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?* So, do you speak against God's ways, and His providences that have fallen out concerning your estate and outward comforts? Who is this? *Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?* Where is that man or woman whose heart is so bold and impudent, as to dare to speak against the administration of God's providence?

The tenth evil of murmuring and discontent is this:

10. *There is a great curse of God upon it. So far as it prevails in one who is wicked, it has the curse of God upon it.*

In Psa 59.15, see there what the curse of God is upon wicked and ungodly men: *Let them wander up and down for food, and grumble if they aren't satisfied.* That is the imprecation and curse upon wicked and ungodly men, that they not be satisfied; that they grumble. When you aren't satisfied in your desires, and find your heart grumbling against God, apply this Scripture. What! is the curse of the wicked upon me? This is the curse that is threatened upon wicked and ungodly ones: that they will grumble if they aren't satisfied.

And in Deu 28.67, it is threatened as a curse of God upon men, that they can't be content with the present condition they're in. *But they will say in the morning, Would to God that it were evening! and at evening, Would to God that it were morning!* So they lie tossing up and down, and cannot be content with any condition they're in, because of the sore afflictions that are upon them.

Therefore, it is threatened as a curse upon them, in Deu 28.34, *that they would go mad for the sight of their eyes, at what they would see.* This is but the extremity of their discontentedness; that is, they will be so discontented they will even go mad. Many men and women in discontented moods are a mad sort of people. And though you may please yourselves in such a mad kind of behavior, you should know that it is a curse of God upon men, to be given up to a kind of madness for the evils which they imagine have come upon them, and which they fear. In the 47th verse, there is a striking expression to show the curse of God on murmuring hearts. The Lord threatens the curses that shall be upon them, and says (Deu 28.45-47): *The curses shall pursue you, and they shall be upon you for a sign, and for a wonder, and upon your seed forever: Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things.* God here threatens to bring His curse upon them, so as to make them a wonder and a sign to others. Why? *Because they did not serve the Lord with joyfulness of heart.* Therefore God would bring such a curse upon them, as to make them a wonder to all who were about them. Oh! how far then are *you*, who have a murmuring heart, from serving the Lord with joyfulness?

The eleventh evil of discontent and murmuring is this:

11. *There is much of the spirit of Satan in a murmuring spirit.*

The Devil is the most discontented creature in the world. He is the *proudest* creature there is, and the most *discontented* creature, and the most *dejected* creature. Now therefore, however much discontentment you have, that much of the spirit of Satan you have. It was the unclean spirit that went up and down and found no rest (Mat 12.43). So when a man or woman's spirit has no rest,

it is a sign that it has much of the unclean spirit, of the spirit of Satan. You should think to yourself like this: "Oh Lord, what? Do I have the spirit of Satan upon me? Satan is the most discontented spirit there is, and Oh! how much of his spirit do I have upon me, that I can find no rest at all?"

Twelfth, murmuring and discontent has this evil in it:

12. *There is an absolute necessity, that you have disquiet all days of your life.*

It's as if a man in a great crowd were to complain that other folks are touching him. While we are in this world, God has so ordered things, that afflictions *must* befall us. And if we complain and are discontented upon every cross and affliction, we will complain and be discontented all the days of our lives! In His just judgment, God will let things fall out on purpose to vex those who have vexing spirits and discontented hearts. Therefore, they will necessarily be disquieted all their days. And men won't much care to disincline those who are continually murmuring. Oh! they will have disquiet all their days!

Lastly, there is this dreadful evil in discontent and murmuring:

13. *God may justly withdraw his care of you, and his protection over you, seeing that God cannot please you in his administration.*

We used to say this to discontented servants: Look, if you're not pleased, improve yourselves when you will. If you have a servant who isn't content with his diet, wages, and work, you say, Improve yourselves. So may God justly say to us — we who profess ourselves servants to Him, to be about His work, and yet are discontented with this thing or that in God's family — God might justly say, Improve yourselves. What if God were to say to any of you, If my care over you won't please you, take care of yourselves; if my protection over you won't please you, protect yourselves. Now, all things that befall you, befall you through a providence of God. And if you are those who belong to God, there is a protection of God over you, and a care of God. If God were to say, "Well, you won't have the benefit of my protection any longer, and I will take no further care of you," wouldn't this be a most dreadful judgment of God from Heaven upon you? Take heed what you do then in being discontented with God's will towards you; or indeed, upon your discontent this may befall you. This is the reason why many people, though God's protection has been very gracious over them for a long time, and they have thrived abundantly, yet afterwards almost all who behold them may say that they live as if God had cast off his care over them, and didn't care what befell them.

Summation

Now then, my brethren, put all these together — all that we were speaking of the last day, and these particulars that have been added now, this morning, for setting out a murmuring and discontented spirit. Oh what an ugly face this sin of murmuring and discontentedness has! Oh! what cause we have to lay our hands upon our hearts, and go away and be humbled before the Lord because of this! Whereas before, your thoughts were prone to be exercised about providing for yourselves, and getting more comforts for yourselves, let the stream of your thoughts now be turned to humble yourselves for your discontentedness. Oh, that you may have your hearts break before God, for otherwise you will fall into it again! Oh, the wretchedness of man's heart!

You will find in Scripture, concerning the people of Israel, how strangely they fell into their murmuring again and again. Observe just three texts of Scripture for this. The first is Exo 15.1. There you have Moses and the congregation singing to God and blessing God for his mercy:

Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord, and spoke saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider He has thrown into the sea. And then, verse 2: The Lord is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation; He is my God and I will prepare him a habitation, my father's God, and I will exalt him. So he goes on, in verse 11: And who is like you, O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

Thus their hearts triumphed in God. But mark this, before the chapter is even ended, in verse 23:

When they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah for they were bitter. Therefore the name of it was called Marah; and the people murmured against Moses.

After so great a mercy as this, what unthankfulness there was in their murmuring! Then God gave them water. But in the very next chapter, they fell back to their murmuring. You don't read that they were humbled for their former murmuring — and therefore they murmur again.

Exo 16.1 ff. All the congregation of the children of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, etc. And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness; and the children of Israel said to them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we ate bread to the full.

Now they want flesh; they wanted *water* before, but now they want *meat*. They fell to murmuring again. They weren't humbled for this murmuring against God, not even when God gave them flesh according to their desires. But they fell to murmuring *again*. They wanted something *else*. In the very next chapter (they didn't go far),

Exo 17.1, And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, and pitched in Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink. Then in the second verse: Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said to them, Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the Lord? And in the third verse: And the people thirsted for water, and the people murmured against Moses and said, Why is this, that you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us, and our children, and our cattle with thirst?

So one time after another, as soon as they received mercy, they were quieted a little; but they were not humbled. I bring these Scriptures to show that if we haven't been humbled for murmuring, then when we meet with the next cross, we will fall to murmuring again.

The Aggravations of Discontentment

There are a number of aggravations of this sin of murmuring. I'll mention but one now, and I will only begin that. The first aggravation is this:

1. To murmur when we enjoy an abundance of mercy.

The greater and more abundant the mercy we enjoy, the greater and viler is the sin of murmuring — as it was here, when God had newly delivered them out of the house of bondage, for them to now murmur because they lack a few particulars that they desire. Oh! to sin against God after a great *mercy*, this is a great *aggravation*, and a most abominable thing.

Now my brethren, the Lord has granted us very great mercies. I'll but speak a word about what God has done lately, what mercies the Lord has granted to us this summer — heaped mercies upon us, one mercy upon another. What a condition we were in at the beginning of this summer. And what a different condition we are now in! Oh what a mercy it is, that the Lord has not taken advantages against us, that He hasn't made those Scriptures (mentioned before) good upon us for all our murmuring. The Lord has gone on with one mercy after another. We hear of mercy in Bristol, and mercy to our brethren in Scotland.¹ But still, if after this we should have anything

¹ During the English Civil War, **Bristol** was a key port on the west coast of England and considered strategically important by both Royalists and Parliamentarians. In the summer of 1645, Royalist forces were defeated by the New Model Army at the Battle of Langport, in Somerset. Following further victories at Bridgwater and Sherborne, Sir Thomas Fairfax marched on Bristol. Prince Rupert returned to organize the defense of the city. The Parliamentary forces besieged the city and after three weeks attacked, eventually forcing Rupert to surrender on September 10th. In **Scotland**, Leslie's Covenanters defeated Montrose's Royalists on September 13th at Philiphaugh, near Selkirk.

Sermon 8: The Evils of Discontentment (cont'd).

befall us that is a bit cross to us, and we should then be ready to quickly murmur again — Oh, let us not so requite God for those mercies of His! Oh let us take heed of giving God any ill requital for His mercies. Oh, give God praise according to His excellent greatness, to His excellent goodness and grace.

And now, has God given to you the Contentment of your hearts? Take heed of being the cause of any grief to your brethren. Don't think that because God has been gracious to you, that therefore He has given you liberty to bring them into bondage. Oh! Let there not be such an ill effect of God's mercy to you, as for you to exclude by petitioning, or in any other way, your brethren whom the Lord has been pleased to make instruments of your peace. Let that not be the fruit of it, nor to desire anything that you don't yet understand. God is very jealous of the glory of His mercy. And if there should be an ill use made of the mercy of God after we enjoy it, Oh! it would go to the heart of God. Nothing is more grievous to the heart of God, than the abuse of mercy — such as now, if any way that is hard and rigid were to be taken towards our brethren, especially those whom God has made such special instruments of good to us, those who have been so willing to risk their lives and all for us. Now, when we have our turns served, let God and His People, and His servants who have been a means to save us, shift for themselves as well as they can. Oh! this is a great aggravation of your sin: to sin against the mercies of God. But as for this aggravation, and especially in this particular, we will speak to it the next day (God willing).

Sermon 9: The Aggravations of Discontentment.

at Stepney, Thursday, Sept. 21, 1645

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

Now, because it is very hard to work on a murmuring spirit, there are several aggravations which I told you we are to consider for further setting out the greatness of this sin. I mentioned but one the last day. We will now continue with that.

1. To be discontent in the midst of mercies, in the enjoyment of an abundance of mercies.

To be discontent in any afflicted condition, is sinful and evil. But to be discontent when we are in the midst of mercies; when we're not able to count the mercies of God, and yet afterward we are discontent because we don't have all we want — this is a greater evil. I only mentioned this the last day, that I might show you what a great sin it is at such a time as *this*. The Lord this summer has multiplied mercies one upon another. The Lord has made this summer to be a continued miracle of mercy. Never did a Kingdom enjoy (in so little space of time) such mercies one upon another. Now the public mercies of God should quiet our hearts, and keep us from discontent. And the sin of discontent for private afflictions is exceedingly aggravated by the consideration of public mercies to the Land.

When the Lord has been so merciful to the land, will you be fretting and murmuring because you don't have in your family all the comforts that you would have? It is a great aggravation of a man's evil, for him to rejoice immoderately in his own private comforts when the Church is in affliction, and when the public suffers grievous and hard troubles. If any man then *rejoices* and gives liberty to himself at that time to satisfy his flesh to the uttermost in all outward comforts, this greatly aggravates his sin. So on the contrary, for any man to be immoderately *troubled* for any private afflictions, when it goes well with the public, and with the Churches, this is a great aggravation of his sin.

It may be that when the Church of God was lowest and went worst in other parts, you abated none of the comforts of your flesh, but gave full liberty to satisfy your flesh as formerly. Know that this was your great sin. So on the other side, when we have received such mercies in public, we should have all our private afflictions swallowed up in the public mercies. We should think to ourselves that even though we are particularly afflicted, yet (blessed be God) it goes well with the Church, and with the public. The consideration of that should mightily quiet our hearts in all our private discontentments. And if it does not, know that our sin is much increased by the mercies of God that are abroad.

Now, will God's mercies aggravate our sins? This is a sad thing; this is to turn the mercies of God into our misery. Didn't you pray to God for these mercies which God lately sent to the public? These great victories that God has given, didn't you pray for them? Now that you have them, isn't there enough in them to quiet your heart for some private trouble that you meet with in your family? Isn't there goodness enough there to cure your discontent? Certainly, they weren't mercies worthy of being prayed for, unless they had so much excellency in them as to countervail some private afflictions.

Public mercies are the aggravations of private discontent, as so of public discontent too. If we receive so many public mercies, and yet everything doesn't go in the public according to what we desire, and we are discontented at that, it will greatly aggravate our sin. God may say, "What! Shall I bestow such mercies upon a people, and yet, if they don't have everything they want, they will be discontent?" Oh! this is exceedingly evil.

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So it is in particular, with the mercies that concern you or your family. If you would consider that you have a great many more mercies than you have afflictions, I dare boldly aver — concerning anyone in this congregation (whatever your afflictions may be) — that there isn't one of you that doesn't have more mercies than afflictions.

Objection. You may say, *Yes, but 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. If it were but *this* mercy — that you have the Day of Grace and Salvation continued to you — it is a greater mercy than any affliction. 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. That you have the use of your limbs, your senses; that you have the health of your bodies — bodily health is a greater mercy than poverty is an affliction. If he is wise, there is no man who is rich and has a sickly body, who would not part with all his riches that he might have his health. Therefore, your mercies are more than your afflictions.

We find in Scripture how the Holy Ghost aggravates the sin of discontent from the consideration of mercies. You have a notable Scripture for this in Num 16.8 ff. It is a speech of Moses to Korah and his company when they murmured:

And Moses said to Korah, Hear, I pray you, you sons of Levi (there is something, that you are sons of Levi), Does it seem but a small thing to you, that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the Tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them?

Korah and his company were murmuring; but mark how Moses aggravates this: “Does it seem a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord?” etc. You see, it is a great honor that God puts upon a man, a great mercy that He bestows upon any man, to separate him from others for Himself — to come near to him, to employ him in the service of the tabernacle, to minister to the congregation in holy things. This is a great mercy; and indeed, it is such a mercy that one would think there is *none* upon whom God bestows such a mercy, who would have a murmuring heart for *any* affliction.

It is true, many ministers of God meet with hard things that might discourage them, and trouble and grieve their spirits. But this consideration — that God is pleased to employ them in such a service near to Himself; that even if they cannot do good to themselves, yet they may do good to others — this should quiet them. And yet in Num 16.10-11: *And He has brought you near to him, and all your brethren, the sons of Levi with you, and you seek the priesthood also? Haven't you enough already? But still you are discontented with what you have, and you must have more. Do you seek still more? Do you seek the priesthood also? For which cause, both you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron, that you murmur against him?* What, has God given you such things, and yet you murmur because you cannot have more? I think this place should keep ministers from murmuring. Whatever afflictions and crosses they meet with, and unkind dealings from men, they should go on with hearts quieted and comforted in the work that God has set them about, and labor to countervail all their afflictions by being more abundant in the work of the Lord. That is the first text of Scripture that shows how the mercies we enjoy are aggravations of the sin of murmuring.

Then a second Scripture is Job 2.10, a speech of Job to his wife: What? said Job, when his wife would have him curse God and die (which was a degree beyond murmuring). Why, he said, *You*

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Speak like one of the foolish women. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not evil? You see, Job helped himself against all murmuring thoughts against the ways of God, with this consideration: that he had received so much good from the Lord. What, though we receive evil, don't we receive good as well? Let us set one against the other. That's the way we should go.

In Ecc 7.14, you have a notable Scripture by which you may see what course is to be taken when the heart rises in murmuring: *In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.* What should they consider? Mark what follows: *God also has set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.* God also has set the one over against the other — meaning this: when you are in prosperity, then indeed every man can be joyful. But what if afflictions befall him, what then? Then *consider.* Consider what? Consider that God has set one over against the other. You have a great deal of affliction, *and* you've had a great deal of prosperity; you have many troubles, *and* you've had many mercies. Make one column of mercies, and one column of afflictions, and write down one against the other. See if God has filled one column as full as the other. You look entirely at your afflictions, but look at your mercies also.

For instance, it may be that God has afflicted you in one child, but he has been merciful to you in another: set one against the other. God afflicted David in Absalom, but he was merciful to David in Solomon. And therefore when David cried out, *Oh Absalom, my son, my son* (2Sam 18.33), if David had thought about Solomon, and cried, *Oh Solomon, my son, my son*, it would have quieted him. It may be that God has been merciful to you in a wife, or in your husband; set that against your affliction. It may be that God crosses you in your estate, but He employs you in His service. It may be that you are afflicted in some of your friends; but you have other friends who are great mercies to you. And therefore you should set one against the other. And it concerns you to do so, *for those mercies will be aggravations of your sins.* You had better make God's mercies a means to lessen your sins, rather than aggravate them. If you don't make the mercies of God help you against your murmuring, you'll make them aggravations of the sin of murmuring.

I beseech you, take but one further consideration for this. If you but let it work on your hearts, I hope you may find a great deal of power in it. Say you find afflictions; and now your hearts are troubled by it, and they murmur. Consider how God's mercies aggravate this sin. In the midst of our sins, we reckon that God should accept our services. But consider this, that if in the midst of our many sins, we hope that God will accept our poor services, then why shouldn't we, in the midst of our afflictions, bless God for His many mercies? Should God be so gracious to us that despite our many sins, He won't cast away our poor duties and services that we perform? Then why shouldn't we in the midst of our sufferings, accept what mercies we have, and not slight or disregard them? If you, in the midst of God's mercies, are not willing to bear the afflictions that God lays upon you, then it would be just for God, in the midst of your sins, to not regard any of your duties. Now, isn't there as much power in your manifold sins to cause God to reject your duties and services, as there is power in your afflictions (in the midst of many mercies) to take your heart away from being affected by God's mercies? And that's the first aggravation of the sin of murmuring — *to murmur in the midst of mercies.*

2. When we murmur about small things.

Naaman's servant said to him, Father (for so he called him), if the prophet had required you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? How much more this little thing. So I say, if the Lord had required you to suffer some *great* thing, wouldn't you have been willing to suffer? How much more this *little* thing! I remember I read in Seneca, a Heathen, where he has this analogy which is a very fine one, to set out the great evil of murmuring over small afflictions. He says,

“Suppose a man has a very fair house to dwell in, and he has fair orchards and gardens, set about with lovely tall trees for ornament. If this man should now murmur because the wind blows a few leaves off his trees, what a most unreasonable thing it would be for him to be weeping and

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wringing his hands, because he loses a few leaves off his trees, when he has an abundance of all kinds of fruit? Thus it is with many; though they have a great many comforts about them, yet some little matter, the blowing off of a few leaves from them, is enough to disquiet them.”

It was a great evil when Ahab, having a kingdom, let the lack of his neighbor’s vineyard have such power to disquiet him (1Kng 21.1ff). So too, for us to murmur, not because we don’t have what we need, but because we don’t have all that we might possibly have — this is a very great sin.

Suppose God gives a woman a child who has all his limbs and parts complete, a child that is very handsome, with excellent parts, wit, and memory, but maybe there is a wart that grows on the child’s finger, and she murmurs at it. Oh, what an affliction this is to her! She is so taken up with it, as to forget to give any thanks to God for her child. And all the goodness of God to her in the child, is swallowed up in that. Wouldn’t you say this was a folly, and a very great evil in a woman to do so? Truly, if we weighed our afflictions aright, they are that kind of thing in comparison to our mercies. Rebekah had a mighty desire to have children. But because she found some trouble in her body when she was with child, she said, *Why am I this way?* It’s as if she said, I would rather have none — just because she found a little pain and trouble in her body. To be discontent when the affliction is small and little, increases the sin of murmuring very much. It is too much for anyone to murmur about the heaviest cross that can befall someone in this world. But to be discontent and murmur about some small things, that’s *worse*. I read about someone who, lying upon a heap of Damask Roses, complained that one of the rose leaves lay double under him. So we are ready, over very small things, to make complaints and be discontented with our condition. And that’s the second aggravation.

3. For men of parts and abilities, to whom God has given wisdom — for them to be discontent and murmur, that’s more than if others do it.

Murmuring and discontentedness is too much in the weakest; and yet we can sometimes bear with it in children and women that are weak. But for those that are men of understanding, that have wisdom, that God employs in public service — that *they* should be discontent with every little thing is an exceedingly great evil. For men in their family (to whom God has given parts and wisdom), when things fall out amiss there, to constantly murmur and repine — their sin is greater than for women and children to do it.

4. The consideration of the freeness of all God’s mercies to us.

Whatever we have is cost-free. Even though we don’t have all we would have, what we do have is free! If what we have were earned, then it would be something; but when we consider that all is from God, for us to murmur at His dispensations is very evil. Suppose a man were entertained by a friend’s family, and he didn’t pay for his board, but had it given to him for nothing. It’s expected that he shouldn’t be ready to find fault with everything in the house, with servants, or with food at table, or the like. If such a one who has plentiful provision, and all is given to him *gratis*, and he pays nothing for his diet — if he should be discontented if a cup isn’t filled for him as he would have it, or if he were to wait a minute longer for a thing than he would have it — we would count this a great evil. So it is with us. We are at God’s table every day, and whatever we have is cost-free. It is considered very unmannerly for a man at his friend’s table to find fault with things, even though at home he may be outspoken. Now, when we are at the table of God (for all God’s administrations to us are “His table”) and all is cost-free, for us to be finding fault and to be discontented is a great aggravation of our sin.

5. When men and women murmur and are still discontented and impatient, when they now have the things they lacked before.

So it is with children sometimes. They cry for a thing, and when you give it to them, they throw it away; they are as discontented as they were before. So it was with the people of Israel. Nothing would quiet them except to have a King. Samuel would have persuaded them to the contrary, and

told them what kind of King they would have. And when they had a king, Hos 10.3, *What would a king do for us?* They were not contented even when they had one.¹ So Rachel must have children, or else she dies; and when she had a little trouble, she was discontented too. So that, “we are neither well, full nor fasting” (as we used to say).

6. For these men and women to be discontent and murmur, whom God had raised from common and low estates and conditions.

This is a very great aggravation if you are discontent now. There was a time when you were low enough, and perhaps when you were so low that you said, “Oh, if only God would deliver me from such an affliction, or give me but a little more in my estate, I’d think I was in a good condition.” But if God by His providence *does* raise you, you are still as greedy for more as you were before, and as discontented as you were before, this is an evil thing. It is evil for people who had common breeding and poor beginnings, to be so picky that nothing can please them, even though not long ago, they were low and common enough themselves. But it is typical for those who are raised from a low and common condition, to be more finicky, fussy, and proud when they are raised, than others who are of better breeding.

It’s too much for a child to be discontented in his father’s house. But if you have taken a poor beggar boy into your house, who lay begging at your door, and set him at your own table — could you bear him complaining that some dish is not well-dressed, or the like? You couldn’t bear it if your own children did it, but you could bear it a great deal better from *them*, than to hear a beggar do it. But *you* are a poor beggar; and God (as it were) has taken you into His great family. And if the Lord has been pleased to raise you higher, so that now you have a competency,² that you may live as a man, and be of use and service in the place where God has set you. Now, will you be discontent because you don’t have everything that you desire? We know that when the Prodigal came to himself, Oh! he said, *In my father’s house is bread enough*. He didn’t say, There is good cheer enough,³ and a great deal of delicacies. No, he thought of nothing but bread, *There’s bread enough*. So it’s typical for men and women, when they are in a low condition, to think that if they may have bread, or any competency, they would be contented and bless God; and yet, when they have their bread and convenient things, they must have still more, or else they aren’t contented. Know that this is an exceedingly great aggravation to your discontentment, when you are raised from a very low condition, and yet you cannot be contented with what you have.

7. For those to be discontent who have been very great sinners and ungodly in their former days.

Some men and women have brought great guiltiness upon themselves, the guilt of *many* sins. They have provoked God exceedingly, and brought themselves in a most dreadful manner under the sentence of God’s Justice. And yet God has been pleased to reprove them. For them to murmur and be discontented with God’s administrations towards them, this is exceedingly evil. Oh! it should be consideration enough to quiet any murmuring in our hearts, to think that we are but sinners — why *shouldn’t* we be sufferers? But then consider, we who are such *great* sinners, who are guilty of such notorious sins, it’s a wonder that we aren’t in Hell at present. For us to yet be discontented and murmur, how exceedingly this increases our sin! Consider how we have crossed God in our sins. If God then crosses us in the way of our sufferings, shouldn’t we sit down quietly, without murmuring? Certainly, you never knew what it meant to be humbled for your manifold sins, if you are discontented at *any* administration of God towards you!

¹ **Hos 10:3** “We have no king, Because we did not fear the LORD. And as for a king, what would he do for us?”

² *Competency*: a sustainable wage; able to provide for oneself and others, or to fulfill one’s role, say, as a parent.

³ *Cheer*: what promotes good spirits or cheerfulness (e.g., wine); provisions prepared for a feast; entertainment.

8. For those men who are of little use in the world, to be discontented.

If you have a beast that you use much, you feed it well. But if you have little use of it, you will turn it onto the commons; ¹ providing little is fitting, because you don't make much use of the beast. If we lived so as to be exceedingly useful to God and his Church, we might expect that God would be pleased to come to us in some encouraging way. But when our consciences tell us that we live and do but little service for God, what if God were to turn us onto the commons? We are just being fed according to our work. Why should any creature be serviceable to you, who are of such little service to God? This one meditation would help us greatly, to think, "I am discontented because such and such creatures aren't serviceable to me. But why should I expect them to be serviceable to me, when I am not serviceable to God?" And that is the eighth aggravation.

9. For us to be discontent at that time when God is about to humble us.

It should be the care of a Christian to observe what God's ways are towards him. What is God about to do with me at this time? Is God about to raise me, to comfort me? Let me embrace God's goodness, and bless His name; let me join with the work of God when he offers mercy to me, to take the mercy that He offers. But again, is God about to humble me? Is God about to break my heart, and to bow my heart before Him? Let me join with God in this work of His. This is what it means for a Christian to walk with God. It is said that Enoch and Noah walked with God — *walked with God*; what is that? It's to observe what is the work God that God is now about, and to join with God in that work of His. So that, however God turns, this way or that, the heart should turn with God, and work suitable to the workings of God towards him.

Now then, say you are discontented and murmur because you are afflicted; but the reason you are afflicted, is because God would humble you. And the great design that God has in afflicting you, is to break and humble your heart. Will you now maintain a spirit that is quite opposite to the work of God? For you to murmur and be discontented, is to resist the work of God. God is doing you good, if you could see it. If He is pleased to sanctify your affliction, to break that hard heart of yours, and humble that proud spirit of yours, it would be the greatest mercy that you ever had in your life. Now, will you still stand against God? It is like saying, "Well, the Lord is about to break me, and humble me, but He shall not." *This* is the language of your murmuring and your discontentedness, though you dare not say so. But even though you don't say so in words, it is certainly the language of the temper of your spirit. Oh! consider what an aggravation this is: "I am discontented when God is about to perform a work on me that is exceedingly for my good; yet I stand against Him and resist Him." That is the ninth aggravation.

10. The more palpable and remarkable the hand of God appears in bringing about an affliction, the greater the sin of murmuring and discontent under an affliction.

It is a great evil at any time to murmur and be discontent. But though it is a sin when I see an ordinary providence working for me, not to submit to it when I see an *extraordinary* providence working — that is a greater sin. That is, when I see the Lord working in some remarkable way about an affliction, beyond what anyone could have thought of, will I resist such a remarkable hand of God? Will I stand against God when I see that He expresses his will in such a remarkable manner, and that he would have me be in such a condition? Indeed, before the will of God is apparent, we may desire to avoid an affliction, and use means for that. But now, when we see God expressing his will from heaven in a manner beyond the ordinary, and more remarkably, then certainly it is fitting for us to fall down and submit to him, and not oppose God when he comes with a mighty stream against us. It's our best way to fall down before him and not resist. For it is an argument for a man's disobedience, when there is not only a command against a sin, but when

¹ That is, common or shared grazing-ground.

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God reveals his command in a terrible way. The more solemn the command of God, the greater the sin in breaking that command.

So too, the more remarkable the hand of God is in bringing an affliction upon us, the greater is the sin for us to murmur and be discontented. God expects us to fall down when, as it were, He speaks from Heaven to us by name, and says, “Well, I will have this spirit of yours fall down. Don’t you see that My hand is stretched out, My eyes are upon you, My thoughts are upon you, and I must have that proud spirit of yours fall down?” Oh! then it’s fitting for the creature to yield and submit to Him. When you speak in an ordinary manner to your servants, or children, you expect them to regard what you say. But when you make them stand still by you, and you speak to them in a more solemn way, if they should *then* disregard what you say, you are very impatient. So certainly God cannot take it well whenever He appears from Heaven to bring an affliction in such a remarkable way, if then we don’t submit to him.

11. To be discontented though God has been exercising us long under affliction, and yet we remain discontented. ¹

For a man or woman to have a murmuring heart when an affliction first befalls them, is an evil then. But it is even more evil to have a murmuring heart after God has been exercising them with affliction for a long time. A heifer, when the yoke is first put upon her, wriggles up and down and won’t be quiet. But if it won’t draw quietly after many months or years, the husbandman would rather fatten it and prepare it for the butcher, than be troubled with it any longer. So too, though the Lord was content to pass by that discontented spirit of yours at first, now that God has kept the yoke on you for a long time — you have been under His afflicting hand, it may be, for many years, and yet you remain discontented — it would be just if God were to bear your murmuring no longer, and if your discontent under the affliction were but a preparation for your destruction.

So you see, when a man or woman has long been exercised with afflictions, and is still discontented, that’s an aggravation of the sin. Mark that text in Heb 12.11: *Now, no chastening for the present is joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness for those who are exercised by it.* It’s true, our afflictions are not joyous but grievous. Though when our affliction first comes it is very grievous, yet (says the text), *afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness for those who are exercised by it.* When you have been in the school of afflictions for a long time, you are a true dullard in Christ’s School, if you haven’t learned this contentment. *I have learned*, said St. Paul, *in every state, to be content with it.* Paul had learned this lesson quickly; you have been learning it many years. Perhaps you may say, as Heman did, that you have been afflicted since your youth (Psa 88.15).

Oh! it’s a very evil thing if being long exercised with afflictions, you are not yet contented. The eye is as tender a part as any in a man’s body, yet the eye is able to continue in and bear a great deal of cold, because it is more used to it. So those who are used to afflictions, those whom God greatly exercises with afflictions (though they have tender spirits otherwise) they should have learned contentedness by this time. A new cart may creak and make a noise; but after it’s been used for a while, it won’t do so. When you were first a Christian, and had newly come into the work of Christ, perhaps you made a noise and couldn’t bear affliction. But are you now an old Christian, and still a murmuring Christian? Oh! that’s a shame for any who are old professors, who have been in the School of Jesus Christ for a long time, to have murmuring and discontented spirits.

And thus you have had Eleven Aggravations of this sin of murmuring and discontent.

¹ That is, God has brought us affliction to humble us, and to teach us contentment; but we refuse to learn.

The Pleas of a Discontented Heart

But now, my brethren, because this discontented humor is a very tough humor,¹ and it is very hard to work upon, there is no one who is discontented that doesn't have something to say for their discontent.² I therefore desire to take away what every discontented heart has to say for himself.

The First Plea

In the first place, someone who is discontented may say, ***It isn't discontentment; it's a sense of my condition.*** He says, "I hope you would have me be sensible of my condition." Perhaps when God takes away a friend or some other comfort, they are inordinately sorrowful, and wring their hands as if they were undone. Let anyone but speak to them about that, and they say, "Wouldn't you have me sensible of my afflictions?" And thus many would hide their sinful murmuring under God's hand with this pretense, that it is only being sensible of their affliction. To that I answer:

First, there is no sense of any affliction that will hinder the sense of God's mercies. In fact, the more we are sensible of our afflictions, if it's in a gracious manner, the more sensible we will be of God's mercy. But you are so sensible of your affliction, that it takes away the sense of all your mercies. Oh! this is *sinful* discontent. This is to be sensible of your condition as God would have you, but it is to be sensible in a wicked way. You go beyond your bounds. By this rule you may come to know when your sorrows and troubles for your afflictions go beyond the bounds. We may be sorrowful when God afflicts, but, Oh! that I might know when my sorrow goes beyond the bounds of it! Truly, you may know it by this rule: Does the sense of your afflictions take away the sense of your mercies? If it does, then it goes beyond the bounds.

Secondly, if it were but a bare sense of an affliction, it wouldn't hinder you in the duties of your condition. The right sense of our afflictions will never hinder us in the performance of the duties of our condition. But here you are so sensible of your affliction, that you are made unfit to perform the duties of the condition that God has put you in. Surely it is more than mere sense of your affliction.

Thirdly, if it were but mere sense of your affliction, you could still bless God in your condition, for the mercies that others have. But your discontentedness usually breeds envy at that. When anyone is discontented with their condition, they have an envious spirit at the conditions of those who are delivered from those afflictions they bear. Certainly, then, it has turned sour and useless, when you are so sensible of your afflictions, and so insensible of mercies, that you are unfit for the duties of your condition, and envious of others who are not afflicted as you are.

The Second Plea

A discontented heart will say, ***I am not so troubled with my afflictions, but it is for my sin.*** He says, "And I hope you will grant that we should be troubled and discontented with our sin. Were it not for the sin that I see in myself, I wouldn't be as discontented as I am. Oh! it is *sin* that is heavy upon me, and *that* is what troubles me more than my afflictions."

Don't deceive your own heart, there is a very great deceit in this. There are many people who, when God's hand is against them, say they are troubled for their sin. But the truth is, it is the affliction that troubles them, rather than their sin. Their heart exceedingly deceives them in this very thing. For,

¹ *Humor*: an underlying malady, inclination, or susceptibility.

² That is, to justify or excuse it.

Sermon 9: The Aggravations of Discontentment.

First, They were never troubled for their sin before this affliction came. But you may say, *It is true I was not before, because my prosperity blinded me; but now God has opened my eyes by afflictions.* Has He?

Secondly, Then your great care will be for removing your *sin* rather than your *affliction*. Are you indeed more solicitous about taking away your sin than taking away your affliction?

Thirdly, If it is your sin that troubles you, then even if God were to take away your *afflictions*, unless your *sin* is also taken away and your heart is better, this wouldn't content you — you couldn't be satisfied. But ordinarily we see that if God removes their afflictions, they are no longer troubled for their sin. Oh! many deceive themselves in this, saying that they are so troubled for their sin — especially those who are so troubled, they say they are in danger of miscarrying, and doing away with themselves. There isn't one in ten thousand who is in such a condition as this; and it is their afflictions rather than their sin that puts them to it. Indeed, you lay everything on this, as if it were the work of the Word, or the spirit of bondage. I remember I heard not long ago of a divine who was judicious, and used to such things. A man came to him, mightily troubled for his sin, and he couldn't tell what to do; he was ready to despair. The divine looked at him, and said, "Aren't you in debt?" He confessed that he was. And at length, the minister began to find out that *this* was his trouble, rather than his sin. And so he was able to help him in that matter, so that his creditors wouldn't come upon him. And then the man was pretty quiet, and wouldn't do away with himself any longer.

For it is a usual thing, that if anything befalls a man that crosses him, Oh then it is his sin that troubles him! Sometimes it's this way with servants. If their governors cross them, *then* they are vexed and fret, and come to deal with them. Oh, then they will say they are sorrowful for their sin. But we must take heed of dallying with God, who is the Seer and Searcher of the secrets of all hearts. Many of you go sullen and gloomy with your families. And then you say it is your sin that lies upon you, when God knows it is otherwise. It is because you cannot have your way.

Fourthly, If you are troubled for your sin, then it will be your great care not to sin in your trouble, not to increase your sin by your trouble. But you are troubled in such a way that, the truth is, you *do* increase your sin in your trouble. And since you said you were troubled for your sin, you have committed more sin than you did before.

And then, *lastly*, if it is your sin that troubles you, then you have a greater need to submit to God's hand, and *accept the punishment of your iniquity*, as in Lev 26.41. There's no better consideration to take away my murmuring, than to look at my sin as the cause of my affliction.

The Third Plea

Oh, says another, I find ***my affliction is such that God withdraws himself from me in my affliction.*** That is what troubles me. And can anybody be quiet *then*? Can anybody be satisfied with such a condition, when the Lord withdraws himself? However great my affliction was, if I didn't find God withdrawing himself from me, I hope I could be content with *any* affliction. But I cannot find the presence of God with me in *this* affliction, as I have found at other times. And *that* is what troubles me, and puts me in such a condition as I am in.

Now to that I answer thus:

First, It is a very evil thing for men and women, upon their affliction, to conclude that God has departed from them. It may be, when it comes to be examined, there is no other reason why you think that God has withdrawn and departed, except that He afflicts you. Now, for you to make such a conclusion — that every time God lays an affliction upon you, He has departed — is a sinful distemper of your heart, and is very dishonorable to God, and grievous to his Spirit.

In Exo 17.7, you may see how God was displeased with such a distemper as this: *And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the contending of the children of Israel, and*

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because they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" Mark that they murmured because they were brought into afflictions. But see what the text says, *Therefore the place was called Massah and Meribah, because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?* This was to tempt God. Sometimes we are afraid that God has departed from us, merely because we are afflicted. I beseech you to observe this Scripture, that God calls it tempting Him, when He afflicts anyone, and they conclude and say that God has departed from them. If a child were to cry out and say his father has become his enemy because the father corrects him, this would be taken badly. I beseech you to consider this one place. It may be of very great use to you, so you're not ready to think that God has departed, just because you are afflicted.

Secondly, If God has departed, the greatest sign of God's departing is because you're so disquieted. You make your disquiet the *fruit* of God's departing. But if it comes to be examined, your disquiet is the *cause* of God's departing from you. If you could but cure your disquiet, if you could but quiet your own hearts, and get them into a better frame of contentedness under God's hand in afflicting you, then you would find God's presence with you. Will you be disquieted this way till God comes again to you? *Your disquiet drives Him from you.* And so, you can never expect God to come and manifest himself comfortably to your souls, till you have gotten your hearts quiet under your afflictions. And therefore, here you see how contrary you reason. You reason, "I am disquiet because God is gone," when the truth is, God is gone because you are disquiet. Reason the other way. "Oh! my disquiet has driven God from me, and therefore if I would ever have the presence of God come again to me, let my heart be quiet under the hand of God."

Thirdly, Do you find God departing from you in your affliction? Will you therefore depart from God too? Is *this* your help? Can you help yourself that way? Because God is gone, will you go too? Do I indeed feel God departing from me? It may be so. It may be that for your trial, God has departed a little from you, and is it so indeed? What unwise course do I take? I commit further sin, and so I go further off from God — what a case I'm in! God goes from me, and I go from God. If the child sees the mother going from it, it isn't for the child to say, My mother has gone over there, and I will go the other way. No! Rather, the child goes crying after the mother. And so the soul should say, "I see the Lord is withdrawing His presence from me, and now it is best for me to head after the Lord with all my might. But I'm sure this murmuring humor is not heading after God; rather, by this I go further and further away from God; and in a little while, what a distance there will be between God and me!"

These are some of the *Reasonings* and *Pleas* of a murmuring and discontented heart. There are many others we will meet with, and endeavor to speak to your hearts in them. Thus this tough humor of discontent may (as it were) be cut with the word, and softened with the word, so that it may pass away. For that is the way of physicians. When they meet with a body which has any tough humor in it, they give it something with a piercing quality. When there is a tough humor that stops the water so it cannot pass, they give something with a piercing quality that may make a passage for it. And so you need things that are piercing, to make a way through this tough humor in the spirits of men and women, by which they had come to live very uncomfortably to themselves and others, and very dishonorably to God.

Sermon 10: The Pleas of a Discontented Heart (cont'd).

at Stepney, Thursday, Sept. 28, 1645

*'For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

Now there are many *Pleas* and *Reasonings* yet remaining, for there is a great deal of activity with a discontented murmuring heart. And I remember I found that the same Hebrew word which signifies to *lodge*, or to *abide*, also signifies to *murmur*. They use the one word for both; for murmuring is a distemper that lodges in men. Once it gets in, it lodges, abides, and continues. And therefore, so that we may dislodge it and get it out, we will labor to show what are the further Reasonings of a discontented heart.

The Fourth Plea

I think I could be content with God's hand, so far as I see the hand of God in it. (Says one) But when men deal so unreasonably and unjustly with me, I don't know how to bear it. I can bear being in *God's* hands, but not in the hands of *men*. My friends or acquaintances, when they deal so unrighteously with me, Oh! this is very hard for me. So that, I don't know how to bear it from men.

To take away this sort of reasoning, consider:

First, Though they are men who bring this cross upon you, yet they are God's instruments. God has a hand in it, and they can go no further than God would have them go. This was what quieted David when Shimei cursed him (2sam 16.5-13). God has a hand in it, David says; though Shimei is a base, wicked man, I look beyond him to God. Do any of your friends deal injuriously and wrongly with you? Then look up to God, and see that man as an instrument in God's hands.

Secondly, If this is your trouble, that men do you so wrong, you are to turn your hearts to pity them, rather than to murmur or be discontented. For the truth is, if you are wronged by other men, you have the better of it. *For it is better to bear wrong a great deal, than to do wrong*. If they wrong you, and your heart can submit to it, you are in a better condition than they are, because it's better to suffer, than do wrong. I remember it is said of Socrates that being very patient when wrong was done to him, they asked him how he came to be so. He said,

"If I meet a man in the street who is diseased, should I be vexed and fretted by him because he is diseased? Those who wrong me, I look upon as diseased men, and therefore I pity them."

Thirdly, Though you meet with hard dealings from men, you meet with nothing but kind, good, and righteous dealings from God. When you meet with unrighteous dealings from them, set one against the other. And that is for the answer to the fourth *Plea*.

The Fifth Plea

Oh! but ***that affliction that comes upon me is an affliction which I never looked for.*** I never thought I would meet with such an affliction; and that is what I don't know how to bear. That is what makes my heart so disquieted, because it was entirely unlooked for and unexpected. For the answer to this:

First, It is your weakness and folly that you didn't look for it and expect it. In Act 20.22-23, see what St. Paul says concerning himself: *And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, save that the Holy Ghost witnesses in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me*. It is true, he says, I don't know the particular affliction that may befall me, but this I know, that the Spirit of God witnesses that *bonds and afflictions await me everywhere*. I look for nothing else but bonds and afflictions wherever I go. So a Christian should do. He should look for afflictions wherever he is. In all conditions he should

Sermon 10: The Pleas of a Discontented Heart (cont'd).

look to meet with afflictions. And therefore, if any affliction befalls him, though indeed he couldn't foresee the particular evil, yet he should think, "This is no more than I looked for in general." Therefore no affliction should come unexpectedly to a Christian.

A *second* answer I would give is this: Is it unexpected? Then the less provision you made for it before it came, the more careful you should be to sanctify God's name in it,¹ now that it has come. It is in this case of afflictions, as it is in mercies: many times mercy comes to you unexpectedly (and that might be a third answer). Set one against the other. I have many mercies that I never looked for, as well as afflictions that I never looked for. Why shouldn't the one *rejoice* me as much as the other *disturbs* me? As it is in mercies, when they come unexpectedly, the less preparation there was in me for receiving mercy, the more need I had to be careful to give God the glory for that mercy, and to sanctify God's name in the enjoyment of the mercy. Oh, so it should be with us now: we've had mercies this summer that we never expected, and therefore we weren't prepared for them. Now we should be that much more careful to give God the glory for them. So when afflictions come that we didn't expect, when it seems that we didn't lay in supplies for them beforehand, we need to be all the more careful to sanctify God's name in them. We should have taken some pains before to prepare for afflictions; but we didn't. So then, take that much more pains now to sanctify God in this affliction.

The Sixth Plea

Oh, but ***my affliction is exceedingly great***, says someone. And though, as you say, "we must be contented," it may be true for those who don't feel such great afflictions. But if you felt the affliction that I feel, you would think it hard to bear, and be content.

To that I answer, however great an affliction it is, isn't as great as your sin. *He has punished you less than your sins* (Ezr 9.13).

Secondly, It might have been a great deal more; you might have been in Hell. And it is (as I remember) Bernard who said, *It is an easier matter to be oppressed, than to perish*. You might have been in Hell; and therefore the greatness of your affliction shouldn't make you murmur, even granting it is great.

Thirdly, It may be that it is the greater because your heart murmurs so. For shackles on a man's legs, if his legs are sore, will cause him more pain. If the shoulder is sore, the burden is greater. It is because your heart is so unsound, that your affliction is so great to you.

And that is the sixth Reasoning.

The Seventh Plea

However you may lessen it, I am sure ***my affliction is far greater than the afflictions of others***.

First, It may be that your discontent makes it greater, when indeed it is not so great in itself.

Secondly, If it were greater than that of others, is your eye then evil because the eye of God is good? Why should you be discontented more, just because God is more gracious to others?

Thirdly, Is your affliction indeed greater than that of others? Then in this you have an opportunity to honor God more than others. So you should consider, "Does God afflict me more than other men? If so, then God gives me an opportunity to honor Him in this affliction more than other men, and to exercise more grace than other men. Let me labor to do that then."

¹ *Sanctify* means to make pure, or free from sin or guilt. To sanctify God's name, is to admit He is blameless in this. He owes us nothing; we owe Him everything. **Psa 51:4** "Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight – That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge."

Fourthly, If all afflictions were laid in a heap together, is yours the worst in the world? Here is a notable saying of Solon,¹ that wise Heathen:

Suppose all the afflictions in the world were laid upon a heap, and every man were to come and take a portion of those afflictions, every one equally, there is scarcely any man that wouldn't rather say, 'Let me have the afflictions I had before, or else I will likely have a greater share, a greater affliction, if I were to equally share with the whole world.'

Now for you who are poor (who are not in extreme poverty), if all the riches in the world were laid together, and you were to have an equal share, you would be poorer than now. But take all afflictions and sorrows whatsoever — if all the sorrows in the world were laid together in a heap, and you had an equal share of them — your portion would be rather more than it is for the present. And therefore, don't complain that it is more than others, so as to murmur because of that.

The Eighth Plea

Another reasoning that murmuring hearts have is this: They think that ***if the affliction were any other affliction than it is, they would be more contented.***

First, You must know that we are not to choose our own rod that God will beat us with.

Secondly, It may be that if it were any other affliction than it is, it wouldn't be as fit for you as this one is. It may be, therefore, that God chooses it because it is the most cross to you, seeing that it is the one most suitable for purging out the ailment that is in you. If a patient takes medicine and he finds himself sickened by it, will he say, "Oh! if it were any other potion I could bear it?" It may be that if it were any other than it is, it wouldn't fit your disease. Indeed, if it didn't work as it does, it wouldn't fit your disease. So when you say about an affliction, *if it were any other than it is, you could bear it*, you are answering yourself with this: "It may be that if it were any other than it is, it wouldn't be fit for me; it wouldn't be right for that sinful humor in my soul. And therefore God sees this to be the fittest and the most suitable for me."

Thirdly, Know that this is the Excellency of Grace in a Christian, *to be fitted for any condition* — not only to say, If it were *this* or *that* condition, but if it were *any* condition. Just as a skilled mariner wouldn't say, "If it were any wind but this. If the wind blew in any point of the compass but this, I could manage my ship. I could show my skill in any other points but this one." Wouldn't mariners laugh at him? It would be shameful for him to say he has skill in any other point but this. So it should be shameful for a Christian to say he has skill in any other affliction but this one. A Christian should be able to manage his ship if the wind blows *any* way; to guide his soul *any* way.

The *fourth* and last answer is this, Know that the Lord has rewards and crowns for all graces, and for honoring them in all conditions. Maybe you think you could honor God in a given way, and God has a crown for that; and God has another crown to set upon the heads of those who honor Him in another way. He has several sorts of crowns in Heaven (if I may say so), and He must put those crowns upon somebody's head. And therefore He exercises you in a variety of conditions, so that you might have the several rewards and crowns that God has to reward and crown those who are faithful in those several conditions.

The Ninth Plea

Oh! but ***the condition that God has put me in, makes me unserviceable, and this is what troubles me.*** It is true, if it were only an affliction and trouble to myself, it wouldn't be so much. But I have been put into such a condition by this affliction, that I am unserviceable, and I can do God no further service. God has put me into a lowly estate, and what good can I do? How burdensome my life is to me, because I can do no service for God; and this is grievous to me.

¹ An Athenian statesman and lawgiver, one of the Seven Sages (c.630-c.560 BC).

Sermon 10: The Pleas of a Discontented Heart (cont'd).

Indeed, if it is true that this is your great grief, it is a *good* sign — if you can say, as in the presence of God, “Above all afflictions in this world, I count being laid aside and unemployed in the service of God, the greatest affliction. I would rather bear any trouble in the world if I might do more service, than to be freed from trouble and be laid aside and do little service.” But *can* you say so? It’s a good sign of grace for a man to count afflictions as great, because he can do but little service to the Lord. Few men count that any affliction at all.

Yet there may be a temptation in this. To murmur at God’s disposal when your calling is low and beggarly, and you can do little service, is many times a temptation to those who are poor, those who are servants, and those who are of weak parts, and are obliged to work hard to provide bread for their families. Many times it is a grievous burden to them to think, “The Lord uses such men in public service, and I live in an obscure way. To what purpose is my life?”

First, to help against this temptation, so that you may not murmur against this condition, just consider that though your condition is low and beggarly, yet you are *in* the Body, you are a *member* of the Body, Though you are but a lowly member, the toe and the finger have their use in the body; though it is not the eye, though it is not the head, or the heart, yet it has its use in the body. There is an excellent expression which I remember Austin (Augustine) has about this:

It is better to be the lowliest member in the body, than to be the highest and most important member, and cut off from the body; it is better to be a little sprig in the tree joined to the root, than to be an arm cut off from the root.

Other men who have but common gifts in the world, who are not members of Jesus Christ, seem indeed to have more excellency than those who are godly. They are in a lowly condition, with lowly parts and lowly callings, but they are not of the body; they are not joined to the root, and therefore their condition is worse. When a great arm of a tree is cut off, it has a great many leaves on it, and it seems a great deal more glorious than those little sprigs that are on the tree; but each little sprig is in a better condition. Why? Because it is joined to the tree, and it has sap from the root, and it flourishes; but the other will wither and die in a little while. So it is with all men of the world. They are like great boughs cut off from the tree. Though they have excellent parts, and have great estates, and pomp and glory in the world, they have no union with Jesus Christ, the Root. But another who lives in a poor condition — say a poor tradesman, a poor servant, a poor man who labors for his family every day — yet he being godly may say, “Though I have but little for the present — little glory, little credit, little comfort — yet I am joined to the Body. And there I have ample supply, and what will feed me with comfort, blessing, and mercy to all eternity.” So all who are in a poor condition in this world, if you are godly, just think about that: though you are lowly, yet you are in the Body, and joined to the root. You are joined to the Principal of comfort, good, blessing, and mercy, who will hold out to eternity, when thousand thousands of glorious pompous men in the world shall wither and perish everlastingly. And therefore, don’t be troubled at your lowly condition.

Secondly, Though you have only a lowly calling in this world, and so you’re not regarded as a man of much use in the world, yet if you are a Christian, God has called you to a higher calling. Your general calling (to salvation) is a high calling, though your particular calling (your occupation) is but lowly and simple. And for that, you have a place in the chapter before my text, Phi 3.14: *I press towards the mark* (says the Apostle) *for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. So that, every Christian has a high calling of God in Christ Jesus. God has called him to the highest thing to which He has called any creature He has made. The angels in Heaven don’t have a higher calling than you have. You who perhaps spend your time in a poor business, in the lowliest calling — say you’re a dung-raker, to rake channels, or cleanse places of filth, or anything else in the world that’s the lowliest that can be conceived of — your general calling as a Christian advances you higher than any particular calling can advance any man in the world. Others, indeed, who are called to manage affairs of State, are in a high calling; or ministers are in a high calling. But yours,

Sermon 10: The Pleas of a Discontented Heart (cont'd).

in some respect, is higher still. A poor servant who must scrape all day about poor, ordinary things, many times may have a temptation such as this: "Oh what a poor condition God has disposed me to! Will God regard someone who is in such a poor, lowly place as I am?" Oh, yes, Christ regards the lowliest member. Just as a man has as real a regard for his toe if it is in pain, and will look after it as truly and certainly as any other member, so Christ regards his lowliest and most common ones.

Thirdly, [As a Christian,] you are in a high calling. Though your outward calling is low with respect to men, yet in respect to God you are in the same calling as the angels in Heaven; and in some degree, you are called to that which is higher. For the Scripture says that the angels come to understand the mystery of the Gospel by the Church. You who are a Christian in that general calling of yours, are joined with principalities and powers, and with angels, in the greatest work that God has called any creature to. And therefore, let that comfort you in this.

Fourthly, [As a man,] your calling is low and ordinary. Yet don't be discontented with that, for you have a Principle of Grace within you (if you are a godly man or woman), which raises your lowest actions to be higher in God's esteem, than all the brave, glorious actions that are done in the world. The Principle of Faith does it: if any man or woman goes on in obedience to God in a way of faith, in the calling in which God has set them (I say, doing this through a Principle of Faith) it raises this action, and makes it a more glorious action than all the glorious victories of Alexander and Caesar. All their triumphs and glorious pomp that they had in all their conquests, were not so glorious as for you to do the lowest action out of faith. Luther speaks of a poor milkmaid; and yet, being a believer, she does it in faith. He compares that action to all the glorious actions of Caesar, and makes that a great deal more eminent and glorious in the eyes of God. Therefore, faith takes your works that are but ordinary, and raises them to be very glorious.

Yes, and the truth is, there is more obedience in submitting to God in a low calling, than to submit to Him in a higher calling. For it is bare obedience, *mere* obedience, that makes you go on in a low calling; but there may be much self-love that makes men go on in a higher calling. For there are riches, credit, and account in the world, and rewards come in by that calling, which don't in the other. To go on quietly in a low calling is *more* obedience to God.

Fifthly, Know further, in the last place, that there is likely to be more reward. For when the Lord comes to reward us, he doesn't examine what the *work* was that men and women have been exercised in, but what their *faithfulness* has been. *Well done, good and faithful servant*, says the Lord. He doesn't say, *Well done, good servant*, for you have been faithful to me in public works, ruling cities and states, and affairs in kingdoms, and therefore you shall be rewarded. No, but, *Well done, good and faithful servant*. Now, you may be *faithful* in a little as well as others are in more, by going on and working your day's labor. When you get but a couple of shillings to maintain your family, you may be as faithful in this as those are who rule a kingdom. God looks to a man's faithfulness. And you may have as great a reward for your faithfulness, you who are a poor servant in the kitchen all day, as another who sits upon the Throne all day. And you may have as great a crown of glory at the Day of Judgment, as a King who sits upon the throne, who has ruled for God upon his throne. Yes, your faithfulness may be rewarded by God with as great a glory, as a King who has swayed his scepter for God — because, I say, the Lord doesn't so much look at the work that is done, as at the faithfulness of our hearts in doing it.

Then, why shouldn't every one of us go on comfortably and cheerfully in our low condition? For why may I not be faithful as well as another? It is true, I cannot come to be as rich a man, and as honorable as others; but I may be as *faithful* as any other man. Every one of you may conclude that for yourselves. What is to prevent you, who are the poorest and lowliest, from being as faithful as the greatest? Yes, you may have as glorious a Crown in Heaven; and therefore go comfortably and cheerfully on your way.

The Tenth Plea

There is another reasoning that some may have, and it is this: *Oh! I could bear much affliction in some other way; but this is very grievous to me: **the unsettledness of my condition.*** Even if my condition were but low, if it were *settled*, I could be content. But it is so inconstant, and so unsettled, that I can never know what to trust to. I'm tossed up and down in the world in an unsettled condition, and this is hard to be content with.

Now to that I answer, *First*, what the Psalmist says, Psa 39.5, *Every man in his settled estate is vanity.* Your Bibles have it, *Every man at his best estate is vanity*; the phrase is *his settled estate*. You think if you were but settled, *Oh then* you could be content; but the truth is, man in his settled estate is vanity.

Secondly, I answer that perhaps God sees that it is better for you to live in continual dependence on Him — not to know what your condition will be on the morrow — than for you to have a more settled condition in respect to the comforts of the creature. Remember what we spoke of before, that Christ doesn't teach you to pray, Lord, give me enough to serve me for two or three years, but *give us this day our daily bread* — to teach us that we must live upon God in a dependent condition, every day for daily bread. Here was the difference between the Land of Canaan and Egypt: the land of Canaan depended on God to water it with showers from Heaven; but Egypt had a constant way to water the country, that didn't so much depend upon Heaven for water, but upon the river Nile, which at certain times overflowed the country. And knowing that watering their country depended upon that River, and not upon heaven, they grew more proud. Therefore the Scripture, to express Pharaoh's pride, presents him as saying, *The river is mine* (Eze 29.3, 9). He could order the river as he pleased, for it was his. Canaan was a country which was to depend upon God. Though they had rain at one time, they didn't know whether they would have it at another; and so they lived always in dependence upon God, not knowing what would become of them.

Now, God thought this to be a better land for His people than Egypt. And this is given as one reason among others for it: because the Lord looked at this as more suitable to the state of His people who were to live by faith — to continually depend upon Heaven, upon Himself, and not to have a constant settled way in the creature for their outward dependence. And we find by experience, that when those who are godly, live in the greatest dependence upon God, and don't have settled income from the creature, they exercise Faith more, and are in a better condition for their souls than before. *Oh!* many times it falls out that the worse your outward estate is, the better your soul is; and the better your outward estate is, the worse your soul is.

We read in Ezr 4.13, the objection that their enemies had against the people of Israel building the wall of the city. They wrote to Artaxerxes against them, saying, *Be it known to the king, that if the city is built, and the walls set up again, then will not they pay toll, tribute, and custom. And so you will damage the revenue of the King.* If the wall is built (they say), then they will refuse to pay toll, tribute, and custom to the King. That is, so long as they live in such a condition — where they depend wholly upon the King, and live at the King's mercy, and are not in a city with walls, but the king may come upon them whenever he will — that is how long they will pay custom to the King. But once they build a wall, and can defend themselves, and don't have to depend upon the king as before, then they will deny paying toll, tribute, and custom.

This is how it is for all the world, between God and men's souls. When a soul lives in a way of mere dependence upon God, such that he sensibly sees God has him at an advantage in every moment, *Oh!* then such a soul will pay toll and custom. That soul exercises faith, and begs his daily bread every day. But if God hedges that man about with an estate, with prosperity — perhaps an inheritance befallen him; perhaps he has a constant office that brings in so much yearly to him, duly paid — he isn't so sensible now of his dependence upon God. He begins now to pay less toll and custom to God than before. God has less service from this man now than before. God sees

that it is better for his people to live in a dependent condition. We are very loath, in respect to God, to be dependent. We would all be Independents this way; we would be of ourselves and have no dependence upon the Lord. But God sees that it is better for us to live in a dependent condition.

Further, this may be your comfort: though for outward things you are mightily unsettled, yet for the great things of your soul and your eternal estate, *there* you are settled. You have a settled way, a constant way of fetching supply. Joh 1.16, *Of his fullness we receive grace for grace*. You have there an abundance of treasure to go to, and to get all that you stand in need of. And observe that now your condition is more settled in the Covenant of Grace, than it was in the Covenant of Works. In the Covenant of Works God gave man a stock to trade with; but He put it in man's own hand, so that he might trade, and gain or lose. But now, in the Covenant of grace, God makes sure that the stock is kept in the hand of Christ, and we must continually go to Him for our supply, for Christ keeps the stock. Perhaps we may trifle away something in our trading, but God takes care that we never exhaust the stock. It is like when a man's son goes broke, having squandered away his stock that the father gave him before. Afterwards the father puts his stock into a friend's hand and says, *You will keep the stock, and it won't be at my son's disposal*. So we are in a more settled condition in respect to our eternal estate than Adam was in innocence. Therefore, let that comfort us in all our unsettled conditions in the matters of the world.

The Eleventh Plea

But yet there's another reasoning that many murmuring hearts think to feed their ailment with. They say, ***If I had never been in a better condition, then I could bear this affliction***. If God had always kept me in such a low condition, I could be content. Oh! but there was a time when I prospered more, and my hands were full. And therefore, now it is harder for me to be brought low, as in these times. Perhaps a man who had five or six hundred a year, but now has had nothing for a great while — if that man had not been born to so much, or had never prospered in any higher degree than he is in now, this affliction would have been less. Perhaps he has some money and friends to live upon. But if he had never been in a better condition, he wouldn't have counted it so great a matter to be without it now.

Many times, this is our greatest wound: that once we were in a better condition; but it is the most unreasonable thing for us to murmur upon *this* ground, of *any*.

For *first*, do you see this as evil,¹ just because God has been good to you up till now? It is a sick thing for us to see evil in it, just because God is good to others. But to look upon our condition as evil now, just because God was once good to us — has God done you any wrong, just because he was formerly better to *you* than he was to *others*?

Secondly, Did you previously prosper more? Did God previously give you more prosperity? It was to prepare you for afflictions. We should look at all our outward prosperity as a preparation for afflictions. If you had done so, then it would not have been so difficult for you to endure affliction now. When you had a great estate, if you made use of the mercy of God to prepare you for your afflicted estate, then the change of your estate would not be so grievous. Every Christian should do that. Do I have an estate now? I should prepare for poverty. Do I have health now? I should prepare for sickness. Do I have liberty? Let me prepare myself for imprisonment. How do I know what God may call me to? Do I have comfort and peace now in my conscience? Does God shine upon me? While I have this, let me prepare for God's withdrawing from me. Am I delivered from temptations? Let me prepare now for the time of temptations. If you would do so, the change of your condition would not be so grievous to you.

¹ Originally, "is the eye evil, because God has been good to you up till now?" An *evil eye* means to curse someone by a glance. Here it means to think you're cursed, by the way you see yourself: whether compared to the past, or to others.

Sermon 10: The Pleas of a Discontented Heart (cont'd).

Mariners who are in a calm, prepare for storms. They wouldn't say, "If we never had calms, we'd bear storms. But we've had calms for so many years or weeks together, this storm is grievous." In your calm you are to prepare for storms, and the storm will be less.

You should reason quite contrary, and say, "Now I am in an afflicted condition. Oh! but blessed be God, *I was in a comfortable condition*; and blessed be God that He was with me beforehand in His mercy." This one consideration may help murmuring hearts.

Do you murmur because once you were better off? Know that God was with you beforehand in the ways of mercy, and you should rather think this way: "I have lived these many years (forty years or perhaps more) in a comfortable condition. I have lived in health, and peace, and plenty. What if the remaining part of my time should have some sorrow and affliction? The Lord has granted me comfortable sunshine all day long till towards evening; and what if at seven or eight o'clock at night it begins to rain? Let me thank God I have had such fair weather all day."

You who are going on a voyage, and have a comfortable wind, and very fair weather for many months together. What if you have a little storm when you are within sight of land? Will you murmur and repine? Oh no. Rather, you will bless God that you've had such a comfortable voyage for so long.

Oh! this consideration would help us all: what if God said now, "Well, you'll never see comfortable days again in outward things in this world." Then you have cause to fall down and bless God's name, that you have had so many comfortable days. But now you reason quite the contrary. Whereas you should bless God that you have had so much comfort, you make what you had *before*, an aggravation of your afflictions *now*; and so you murmur and are discontented.

That which God gave you before, on what terms did you hold it? Did you have it in writing that it was yours, *To have and to hold forever*? God gives no such thing. I say, God gives to no man anything but grace to run for the tenure. There's no such thing in all of God's writings, for any outward comforts, *To have and to hold for you and your heirs*. Indeed, for grace He gives it only to *you* to have and to hold forever — not for everyone who comes out of your loins. But God doesn't give any outward thing upon such a tenure as that. If God gives me an understanding of himself, and faith, and humility, and love, and patience, and such graces of his Spirit, he gives them to me forever. If He gives me himself, and his Christ, and his Promise, and his Covenant, he gives them to me forever. Who am I, therefore, that the sun should always shine upon me, that I must have fair weather all my days? That which God gives to me, he gives as a pledge of his love. Let me return it to him as a pledge of my obedience. There's all the reason in the world for it — all that a godly man receives from God, he receives as a pledge of God's love to him. Therefore, when he comes into an afflicted condition, God says, "Return to me as a pledge of your obedience, what you had from me as a pledge of my love." We should cheerfully come to God, and bless God, that we have anything to render to him as a pledge of our obedience. And we should say, Oh, it is your love, O Lord, which has given us everything, which enables us to render a pledge of our obedience to you. When God calls for your estate or any comforts that you have, God calls for it as a pledge of your obedience to him.

The Twelfth Plea

Another reasoning of a murmuring heart is this: Oh, but after I have taken a great deal of pains for this comfort, I am then crossed in it. ***To be crossed now, after all the labor and pains I have taken, oh, this goes very hard.***

I answer *first*, The greater the cross, the more obedience and submission.

Secondly, When you took a great deal of pains, was it with submission to God? Did you take pains with the resolution that you must have such a thing when you labored for it? If so, then know you didn't labor as a Christian. But if you labored and took pains, was it with this resignation to God?

Sermon 10: The Pleas of a Discontented Heart (cont'd).

“Lord, I am taking pains in the way of my calling, but it is with submission. I depend wholly upon You for success and a blessing.” And what was it you aimed at in your labor? Was it that you might walk with God in the place that God had set you? A Christian should do so in his outward calling: “I am diligent in my outward calling, but it is that I might obey God in it. It’s true that I do it to provide for my family. But the *chief* thing I aim at is that I might yield obedience to God in the way that God has set me.” Now, if God calls you to another condition, to obey Him in, even though it is by suffering, you will do it if your heart is right.

Thirdly, There will be further testimony of your love to God, if you will now yield yourself to God in what costs you dearly. 2Sam 24.24, *Shall I offer that to God*, said David, *which cost me nothing?* Your outward comforts have cost you much, and you have taken great pains to obtain them. And now, if you can submit to God in the lack of them, then in this, I say, your love is further shown — that you can offer to God what cost you dearly.

Now, these are the principal reasonings of a discontented heart. But there is one plea more that may be named.

The Thirteenth Plea

Some say, Though I confess my affliction is somewhat hard, and I feel some trouble within me, yet I thank God that I don’t break out in discontented ways to the dishonor of God. ***I keep it in, although I have great turmoil within my own heart.*** Oh, don’t satisfy yourselves with that. For the distempers of your hearts, and their sinful workings, are like spoken words before God. “My soul, be silent to God.” We spoke of it at the beginning of opening this Scripture. It isn’t enough for your *tongue* to be silent, but your *soul* must also be silent. There may be a sullen discontentedness of heart, as well as a discontentedness manifested in words. And if you don’t mortify that inward sullenness, then when you are afflicted a little more, it will break out at last.

And thus the Lord, I hope, has met with the chief *Reasonings* and *Pleas* for our discontent in our conditions. I beseech you in the name of God, consider these things. And because they concern your own hearts, you may remember them that much better. I had hoped to make a little entrance into the next topic, as a way of helping you to this Grace of Contentment. It is a most excellent grace, of admirable use, as you’ve heard. And the contrary is very sinful and vile.

Sermon 11: Considerations and Directions.

at Stepney, Sunday, Oct. 1, 1645.

*For I have learned, in whatever state I am,
to be content with it. Phi 4.11*

Now we are coming to the close of this point of contentment which Jesus Christ teaches those who are in his School. We have opened the point to you, and shown you where the Art, and Skill, and Mystery of Christian Contentment lies; and shown many things in the way of application, rebuking the lack of it. And the last day, I finished that point of showing the various reasonings of a murmuring and discontented heart. Being desirous to make an end, I will now leave what was said, and proceed to what remains. There are only these two things for working your hearts to this grace of Christian contentment:

First, propounding several CONSIDERATIONS for contenting the heart in any afflicted condition.
Secondly, propounding DIRECTIONS, what should be done for working our hearts to this.

CONSIDERATIONS

What we should consider in all our wants and inclinations to discontentment:

The First Consideration

The greatness of the mercies that we have, and the paltriness of the things we lack. The things we lack (if we are godly) are things of very small moment in comparison to the things we have; and the things we have are things of very great moment. For the most part, people are discontent and murmur about not having the things that reprobates have, or may have. Why should you be troubled so much for lacking what a man or woman may have, who is a reprobate? — such as, that your estate is not so great, your health not so perfect, your credit not so much. You may have all those things and yet be a reprobate! Now, will you be discontent for what a reprobate may have?

I will give you the example of a couple of godly men meeting together, Anthony and Didymus. Didymus was blind, and yet a man of very excellent parts and graces. Anthony asked him if he wasn't troubled by his lack of sight. He confessed he was, but (he says) should you be troubled at the lack of what flies and dogs have, and not rather rejoice and be thankful that you have what angels have? God has given you those good things that make angels glorious; isn't that enough for you, though you lack what a fly has? And so a Christian should reason the case with himself: What am I discontented for? Am I discontented for lack of what a dog may have, what a devil may have, what a reprobate may have? Shall I be discontented for not having that, when God has given me what makes angels glorious? *Blessed be God* (says the Apostle in Eph 1.3) *who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.* It may be that you don't have blessings in earthly places as great as some others have; but if the Lord has blessed you in heavenly places, that should content you. There are blessings in heaven; and He has set you here for the present, as if it were in heaven, in a heavenly place. The consideration of the greatness of the mercies that we have, and the littleness of the things that God has denied us, is a very powerful consideration to work this Grace of Contentment.

The Second Consideration

That God being with us beforehand with His mercies, should content us. I spoke of this as an aggravation of our discontent, but now I will use it as a consideration to help us to contentment. You lack many comforts now, but hasn't God been with you beforehand up to now? Oh, you have had mercy enough already to make you spend all the strength you have, and the time you'll live, to bless God for what you've had already. I remember, I read of a good man who had lived to fifty years of age, and enjoyed his health for forty-eight years exceedingly well, and lived in prosperity.

But the last two years, his body was exceedingly diseased. He had the strangury,¹ and was in great pain. But he reasoned the case with himself this way: “Oh, Lord, you might have made *all* my life a life of torment and pain, but you let me have forty-eight years in health. I will praise your mercies for what I have had, and I will praise your justice for what I now feel.” Oh, it is a good consideration for us, to think that God is with us beforehand, in the way of mercy. Suppose God were to take away your estates from some of you who have lived comfortably for a great while. You may say, “It aggravates our misery, that we’ve had estates.” But it is through your *unthankfulness* that it does so. We should bless God for what we’ve had, and not think that we are *worse* because we’ve had this and that. We might have been miserable always. And certainly, that man’s condition is not very miserable, who has no other great aggravation of his misery, except that once he was happy. If there is nothing else to make you miserable, that’s not an aggravation you cannot bear; for there is much mercy in that you had it once. And therefore, let that content you.

The Third Consideration

The abundance of mercies that God bestows, and we enjoy. It is a saying of Luther that, “The Sea of God’s mercies should swallow up all our particular afflictions.” Name any affliction that is upon you, and there’s a Sea of Mercy to swallow it up. If you pour a pailful of water on the floor of your house, it makes a great show; but if you throw it into the sea, there’s no sign of it. So too, afflictions considered in themselves, we think are very great. But let them be considered with the Sea of God’s mercies that we enjoy, and then they are not so much; they are nothing in comparison.

The Fourth Consideration

The way of God towards all creatures. God continues all creatures in a vicissitude of several conditions, such as: we don’t always have summer, but winter succeeds summer; we don’t always have day, but day and night; we don’t always have fair weather, but fair and foul; the vegetative creatures don’t always flourish, but the sap is still in the root and they only seem to be dead. There is a vicissitude of all things in the world: the sun doesn’t always shine on us here, but darkness comes after the light. Now, seeing that God has so ordered things with all creatures, that there is a mixture of conditions, why should we think it too much if there should be a vicissitude of conditions with us, sometimes in a way of prosperity, and sometimes in a way of affliction?

The Fifth Consideration

The creatures suffer for us; why shouldn’t we be willing to suffer, to be serviceable to God? God subjects other creatures; they are prepared to lose their lives for us, to lose whatever beauty and excellency they have to be serviceable to us. Why shouldn’t we be willing to part with anything in in a way of service for God? Certainly, there isn’t so great a distance between other creatures and Mankind, as there is between Mankind and God. This is an expression of the martyr, Master Hooper, who we read of in the *Book of Martyrs*.² In laboring to work his own heart and the hearts of others to contentedness in the midst of his sufferings, he has this comparison, and you may be put in mind of it every day. He said,

I look upon the creature and see what it suffers to be useful to me. Thus, brute beasts must die, be roasted in the fire, and boiled; must be put on the cutting board, hacked all in pieces, chewed in the mouth; and in the stomach turned into what is loathsome if one should behold it — and all to nourish me, to be useful to my body. And shall I not be willing to be made anything for

¹ A painful discharge of urine, drop by drop, produced by spasmodic muscular contraction.

² *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (1563). John Hooper (c. 1495-1555). was influenced by Zwingli and Bullinger during 9 years of self-exile in Zurich. He approved of the *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549), which he promoted in England, against the wishes of Cranmer, Ridley, Bucer, and Peter Martyr. He became bishop of Gloucester in 1550. In 1553, Mary I put him at the top of her list of enemies. When his friends urged him to flee. He replied, “Once I did flee and took to my feet. But now, because I am called to this place and vocation, I am thoroughly persuaded to tarry, and to live and die with my sheep.” He was burned at the stake in 1555. His writings later influenced the Puritans of Elizabeth’s reign.

Sermon 11: Considerations and Directions.

God, for His service? What an abundance of alterations the creature comes under to be made useful to me, to preserve me. Then, if God would do so with me for *His* use, as He subjects the creatures to me for *my* use, why shouldn't I rest contented? If God would take away my estate and make me poor; if God would take away my life, hack me in pieces, put me in prison — whatever He does — yet I won't suffer more for God than the creature does for me. And surely I am infinitely more bound to God than the creature is to me; and there is not so great a distance between me and the creature, as between me and God.

Such considerations as these wrought the heart of that martyr to contentedness in his sufferings. And every time the creature is upon your cutting board you may think, What! does God make the creature suffer for my use, not only for my nourishment, but for my delight? What am I, then, in respect to the infinite God?

The Sixth Consideration

We have but a little time in this world. If you are godly, you will never suffer except in this world. Why, but shut your eyes, and shortly another life is come. As that martyr said to his fellow martyr, “But shut your eyes, and the next time they are opened you shall be in another world.”

Athanasius said (when he was banished), “It is but a little cloud, and (notwithstanding) it will be over shortly.”¹ These afflictions are but for a moment. A mariner, when he is abroad, doesn't think much of it if a storm arises, especially if he can see the Heavens clear beyond it. He says, It will be over shortly. Consider, we don't have long to live. It may be over before our days are at an end. But supposing it were not, death will put an end to all — all afflictions and troubles will soon be at an end by death.

The Seventh Consideration

Consider the condition that others have been in, who have been our betters. We made some use of this before to show the evil of discontentment. But further, it is a mighty argument to work upon our hearts a contentedness in any condition. Many times you consider those who are *above* you; but consider those who are *under* you.

Jacob was in a poor, lowly condition, though he was the heir of both Abraham and Isaac — for the blessing was upon him, and the promise continued in him. Abraham, his grandfather, was able to make a kind of army of his own household, 300 to fight with a king. And yet Jacob, his grandchild, goes over the Jordan with only a staff, and lives in a very poor and lowly condition for a long time. Moses might have had all the treasures in Egypt, and as some historians say of him, Pharaoh's daughter adopted him as her son, because Pharaoh had no heir for the crown. And so he was likely to have come to the crown.² Yet, what a low condition he lived in when he went to live with Jethro, his father-in-law, forty years together. Afterward, when he returned to Egypt — he and his wife and children, and all that he had — he had but one beast to carry him. He went in a lowly condition when he went from his father-in-law back to Egypt.

And Elijah, we know how was fed with ravens, and obliged to shift for his life from time to time, and to run up and down in the wilderness. And so did Elisha. He was at various times in a very low condition. The prophets of God were hidden in a cave by Obadiah, and there to be fed with

¹ Athanasius of Alexandria (298-373). At the Council of Nicea in 325, he opposed Arianism, arguing that the Godhead is of one substance — that Jesus was truly man and truly God, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Athanasius was banished five times during his life, as the contest swung back and forth between the Arians and Trinitarians.

² Alfred Edersheim thought it might have been Thutmose II at the time of the Exodus. He reigned c. 1493-1479 BC; that seems a bit early (the Exodus was likely c. 1450 BC). Others think it was Ramses II, because of the large-scale construction during his time (1279-1213 BC); that seems a bit late. His father was Seti I (1294-1279), son of Ramses I, who was preceded by Horemheb (c. 1319-1292), who indeed had no sons. Archaeology and dating are inexact sciences at best, and often matters of conjecture, as you can see. — WHG

bread and water. And the prophet Jeremiah was put into a dungeon, and Oh how he was used! It would be endless thing to name the particulars of the great sufferings of the people of God.

In former times, we sometimes made use of this argument in other ways. The great instruments of God in the first Reformation¹ lived in great straits, in a very low condition. Even Luther himself — though he was a man of such public use, and a great man in the courts of princes — when he was to die, he says, “Lord, I have neither house nor lands, nor estate, to leave anything to wife or children, but I commit them to you.” And so Musculus,² who was a very choice instrument of God in his time, was a man who was worth even a kingdom for the excellency of his spirit and learning (for he was one of the most learned men of his time); yet he sometimes dug ditches to get bread for his family. What would we do if we were in such a condition as these men? But, above all these, set Christ before us, who professes that the birds of the air had nests, and the foxes had holes, yet the Son of Man had no place to hide his head (Mat 8.20), that low a condition he was in.

The consideration of such things as these is very useful. It is likewise useful for men and women of estates to go to poor people’s houses and see how they live; to go to hospitals and see the wounds of soldiers and others; and to see the lamentable condition in which people live in some almshouses, and what poor fare they have, and what straits they are put to. You sometimes hear of them; but if you went to *see* them it would not only stir up charity towards them, but stir up thankfulness in your hearts towards God. It would be a special means to help you against any discontent. You would go away seeing cause to bless God and say, “If I were in such a condition as they are in what would I do? How could I bear it? And yet what reason is there that God so orders and disposes of things, that they should be so low in their estates, and I so high? I know of no reason but free grace. God will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy.” These are some good considerations for the furtherance of Contentment.

The Eighth Consideration

Before your conversion, before God worked upon your souls, you were contented in the world without grace, even though you had no interest in God or Christ. Why can’t you now be contented with grace and spiritual things, without the world? If you were content with the world without grace, there is reason for you to be content *with grace* and *without the world*. Certainly, there’s infinitely more reason. Indeed, you see that many men of the world have a kind of contentment — they don’t murmur or repine when the world comes [with adversity], even though they have no interest in God and Christ. Can’t you then have as much contentment with God and Christ *without* the world, as they can with the world and *without* God and Christ? This is an infinite shame that you cannot.

The Ninth Consideration

That when God has given you such contentment, you haven’t given Him the glory. When God has let you have your heart’s desire, what have you done with your heart’s desire? You haven’t been any the better for it; it may be that many times you have been the worse. And therefore, let this satisfy you: “I may meet with crosses; but when I had contentment, and all things were coming in, God had little or no glory from me. And therefore, let that be a means now to quiet me in my discontented thoughts.”

The Tenth Consideration

Lastly, consider all the experience you’ve had of God’s doing good to you in the absence of many comforts. When God crosses you, have you never experienced the abundance of good in your

¹ The mid-1600s were considered a 2nd Reformation, though the label is variously applied.

² Wolfgang Musculus (1497–1563), born in German-speaking eastern France, died in Bern, Switzerland. He was known all over Europe. His songs are still sung in Reformation churches. J. S. Bach used Musculus’ 1530 hymn, a paraphrase of Psalm 23, as the text for his chorale cantata.

afflictions? It is true, when ministers only tell men that God will work good out of their afflictions, they hear them speak, and think they speak like good men — but they feel little or no good themselves; they feel nothing but pain. But when we can say to you not only that God has said he will work good out of your afflictions, but we can say to you that you yourselves have found it so *by experience* — that God has made former afflictions to be a great benefit to you, and that you wouldn't have been without them, or be without the good that came by them, for the world — such experiences will exceedingly quiet the heart and bring it to contentment. Therefore, think this way with yourself: “Lord, why may not this affliction work as great a good upon me as other afflictions have done before?”

Perhaps you will find many other considerations besides these, in your own meditations. These are the principal ones that I have thought of. I will add only one word to this, about someone who once was a great merchant and trader (his name was Zeno).¹ He once suffered a shipwreck. He said, “I never made a better voyage, or sailed better, than the time I suffered shipwreck.” Now, this was a strange saying, that he had never made a better voyage! It would be a strange paradox to you who are mariners, to say it's a good voyage when you suffer shipwreck. But he meant, because he got so much good by it — God was pleased to bless it so far to him; he gained so much for his soul by it, so much in soul-riches — that he counted it the best voyage he ever had.

And truly, sometimes it is so, even to you who are godly. I have no doubt that you find it so — that your worst voyages have proved your best. When you've met with the greatest crosses in a voyage, God has been pleased to turn them to a greater good to you in some other way. It's true, we may not desire crosses, just so they may be turned to other advantages. But when God in his providence so orders things, that you meet with bad voyages, you may expect that God will turn them to a greater good. And those who have been exercised in the ways of godliness for any length of time, I have no doubt that they have an abundance of experiences that they've gained by them.

You know, sometimes it is better to be in a little ship, for many times they have an advantage over greater ones. In a storm, a little ship can thrust into a shallow place, and so be safe. But your great ships cannot. They must be abroad, and tossed up and down in the storm and tempest; and so many times they are split against the rocks. And so, it may be that God sees a storm coming, and if you're in your great ship, you may split upon rocks and sands. God therefore puts you into a lesser vessel, so that you may be safer. We'll lay aside speaking of those considerations now. But I would not have you lay them aside, and put them out of your thoughts. Rather, labor (especially about those that most concern you) to make use of them in needful times, when you find any discontentedness of spirit arise in you.

DIRECTIONS

The main thing that I intended for this exercise, is to propound directions for what to do for helping our hearts toward Contentment. As for any further considerations, we prevented speaking largely of them, because we opened most things in showing the Lessons that Christ teaches men when he brings them into his School, to teach them this Art. I say, there we have spoken of the special things that are most considerable to help us toward this Grace of Contentment. Therefore, all I will further do about this point now, will be to give some directions as to the course to take, that we may come to attain this Grace of Contentment.

The First Direction

All the rules and helps in the world will do us little good unless we get a good temper within our hearts. You can never make a ship go steady by propping it up from outside. You know there must be ballast within the ship to make it go steady. And so too, there is nothing outside us that can

¹ Zeno of Citium (c. 334–262 BC). Phoenician philosopher, founder of the Stoic school of philosophy.

keep our hearts in a steady constant way, but only what is within us. Grace is within the soul, and *that* will do it.

The Second Direction

If you would get a contented life, don't grip too much of the world; don't take in more of the business of the world than God calls you to. Don't be greedy about taking in a great deal of the world. For if a man would go among thorns when he may take a simpler way, there is no reason for him to complain that he is pricked by them. Do you go among thorns? Is that your way? If you must of necessity go among them, that's another matter. But if you electively choose that way when you may go another, then you have no cause to complain. So for men and women who pursue things of the world that they don't need, it's no wonder if they are pricked and meet with what disquiets them. For such is the nature of all things here in this world — that everything has some sort of pricker in it. We are likely to meet with disappointments and discontentments in everything we meddle with. And therefore, those who have the least to do with the world (that is, unless God calls them to it — we must put that in), are likely to meet with many things that will discontent them.

The Third Direction

Be sure of your call to every business that you go about. Though it is the least business, be sure you are called to it. Then, whatever you meet with, you may quiet your heart with this: "I know I am where God would have me." Nothing in the world will quiet the heart so much as this — that when I meet with any cross, I know I am where God would have me, in my place and calling. I am about the work that God has set before me. Oh this will quiet and content you when you meet with trouble. What God calls a man to, with that he may have comfort, whatever befalls him. God is to look to you, and to see you blessed in the work God calls you to.

The Fourth Direction

And this is especially true if I add *That I walk by rule in the work I am called to*. I am called to some business, but I must manage this work that I am called to *by Rule*. I must walk by the Word, and order myself in this business according to God's mind, so far as I am able. Add this to the prior direction, and then the quiet and peace of the soul may be made even perfect in a way. When I know it isn't the work that I have put myself upon, but God has called me to it, and I walk by the rule of the Word in it, then whatever may come, God will take care of me there.

It was the saying of a heathen, "If you would subject all things to yourself, subject yourself to reason, and by that you will make all things to be under you."¹ I might add a little more to it: "If you would subject all things to be under you, subject yourself to God, and then the truth is, all things are under you." Many times we have hinted that the reason why many of our gentry have been so malignant among us, is because they are willing to be slaves themselves under some above them at Court, so they may keep their neighbors slaves under themselves. For you know any man till now who was great at Court, could crush any countryman with whom he was angry. If there were an Arbitrary Government, then all those who would be willing to be vassals and slaves to the Prince, can make all others vassals and slaves to themselves.

Now, be willing to be a vassal to God, to be absolutely under God's command, and then, I say, all things in the world are under you. *All things are yours*, says the Apostle (1Cor 3.22-23), *life and death — everything is yours; and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's*. All things in the world are serviceable to that man or woman who is serviceable to God. It is a mighty commendation of God's service. Be willing to be serviceable to God yourself, and God makes all things in the world to be your servants, for so they are. You may ask, "How are they my servants? I cannot command them."

¹ Seneca, Ep. 37.10.

Sermon 11: Considerations and Directions.

They are servants in this, that God orders them all to work for your good (Rom 8.28). There is nothing in the world, says God, that shall not work for your good, and be serviceable to you, if you will be serviceable to Me. Who would not now be God's servant? Subject yourself to God, and all things shall be subjected to you.

Now, so long as we keep within our bounds, we are under protection. But once we break our bounds, we must expect that it will be with us as it is with the deer in the park. While the deer keep within the pale,¹ no dogs will come upon them there, and they can feed quietly. But let the deer get outside the pale, and then every dog in the country will be hunting after them. So it is with men. Let men and women keep within the bounds of the command of God — of the rule that God has set for them in his Word — and they are protected by God. They may go about their business in peace, and never be troubled by anything, but may *cast all their care upon God* (1Pet 5.6-7). God provides for them. But if they go beyond the pale, if they pass their bounds, then they may expect to meet with troubles, and afflictions, and discontent. And therefore, that is a fourth direction: *walk by Rule*.

The Fifth Direction

Exercise much faith. That is the way for contentedness. After you are done with all the considerations that reason may suggest to you, if you still find that these don't do it, Oh then *call for the grace of faith*. A man may go very far with the use of reason alone to help him toward Contentment. But when reason is at a nonplus,² then set faith at work. It was a saying of the reverend Divine, Master Perkins,³ whom God made so useful in his time, "The life of faith is a true life, indeed the only life." Exercise faith, not only in the promise that *all things shall work together for good to those who fear God*, but likewise exercise faith in God Himself, in the attributes of God, as well as in his Word. It was a saying of Socrates, a heathen, that "Since God is so careful for you, why do you need to be careful for anything yourselves?" It was a strange saying for a heathen.

Oh, Christian, if you have any faith, then in the time of extremity think thus: "This is the time that God calls for the exercise of faith." What can you do with your faith, if you cannot quiet your heart when discontent? There was a saying of Dionysius, who had been a king, and afterwards was brought to such a low condition as to earn his living by being a schoolmaster. Someone comes and asks him, "What have you gotten by your philosophy from Plato and others?" "What have I gotten?" He says, "I've gotten this: that though my condition is changed from so high a condition to low, I can still be content." So what do you get by being a believer, a *Christian*? What can you do by your faith? Say, "I can do this: I can in all estates cast my care upon God, cast my burden upon God. I can commit my way to God in peace" Faith can do this.

Therefore, when reason can get no higher, let Faith get upon the shoulders of reason and say, I see land, even though reason cannot see it. I see the good that will come out of all this evil. Exercise faith by often resigning yourself to God, by giving yourself up to God and his ways. The more you surrender yourself to God in a believing way, the more quiet and peace you will have. That is the fifth thing.

The Sixth Direction

Labor to be spiritually minded. That is, often meditate about the things that are above. *If we are risen with Christ*, say the Scriptures, *let us seek the things that are above, where Christ is, who sits at the right hand of God* (Col 3.1).

¹ That is, within the fenced-in area.

² It's fascinating to find the basis for phrases like "beyond the pale," or here "a nonplus" — it adds nothing to your contentment. From this we get the word "nonplussed," meaning unaffected.

³ Will Perkins (1558–1602) — Puritan leader during the reign of Elizabeth I; staunch defender of the five solas.

Be much in spiritual thoughts, in conversing ¹ with things above. Christians have an interest in the things of Heaven. And yet, many converse but very little with them; their meditations are *not* much upon Heavenly things.

This is what some give as the reason why Adam didn't see his nakedness. They think he had so much converse with God, and with things beyond the senses, that he didn't mind or think much about what his nakedness was. Whether that was so or not, I will not say. But I say this, and I am certain of it: that the reason we are so troubled with our nakedness, and with any wants that we have, is because we converse so little with God — so little with spiritual things. Conversing with spiritual things would lift us above the things of the world.

There are those who are bit or stung by a snake; it is because they tread on the ground. If they could be lifted above the earth, they need never fear being stung by snakes, which are crawling underneath. So I may compare the sinful distemper of murmuring, and the temptations and evils that come from that, to snakes which crawl up and down below. If we could get higher, we wouldn't be stung by them. A Heavenly conversation is the way to Contentment.

The Seventh Direction

Don't promise yourselves too much beforehand; and don't take account of things that are too great for you. It is good for us to take hold very low, and not think to aim too high. Don't soar too high in your thoughts beforehand, thinking, Oh if I had but this and that; and so you imagine great matters for yourselves. Rather, be like good Jacob. You know he was a man who lived a very contented life in a lowly condition. He said, Lord, *if I may but have clothes to put on, and food to eat* (Gen 28.20). He looked no higher; he was content with that. So too, if we wouldn't aim our thoughts high, and think that we might have what others have, this and that much, we wouldn't be so troubled when we meet with disappointments. So Paul says, *If we have but food, drink, and clothing, let us be content with that* (1Tim 6.8). He didn't soar too high aloft. Those who look at high things in the world, meet with disappointments; and so they come to be discontent.

Aim as high as you will in spiritual meditations. God gives liberty there to any one of you to be as high as you will, above angels. But, for your outward estate, God would not have you aim at high things. *Do you seek great things?* said the Lord to Baruch. *Don't seek them, for you shall have your life for a prey* (Jer 45.5). In these times especially, it would be a very great evil for anyone to aim at great things. *Don't seek them;* be willing to take hold low, and to creep low. And if God raises you, you will have cause to bless Him. But if you were not to be raised, there wouldn't be much trouble. One who creeps low cannot fall far; it is those who are on high whose fall bruises them the most. That is a good rule: *Don't promise yourselves great matters, nor aim at any great things in the world.*

The Eighth Direction

Labor to get your hearts mortified to the world, dead to the world (Rom 8.13). We must not content ourselves that we have some understanding about the vanity of the creature and such things as these; but we must exercise mortification, and be crucified to the world. Paul said, *I die daily* (1Cor 15.31); we should die daily to the world. *We are baptized into the death of Christ* (Rom 6.3). That is to signify that we have taken such a profession, as to profess to be even like dead men to the world. Now, no crosses that fall out in the world will trouble those who are dead. If our hearts are dead to the world, we shouldn't be troubled much by the changes of the world, nor by the tossing about of worldly things.

¹ *Conversing*: gaining knowledge of a thing, from long intercourse or study. It is learning and adopting the governing principles of a thing, such that you are *conversant* with them. They then govern your conduct; and your conduct is known as your *conversation*.

Sermon 11: Considerations and Directions.

It is very notable that those soldiers who came to break the bones of Christ, broke the legs of the one who was crucified with him, and of the other. But when they came to Christ, they found he was dead; and so they didn't break his legs. Yes, there was providence in it, to fulfill a prophecy; but because they found he was dead, they didn't break his bones. Let afflictions and troubles find you with a heart mortified to the world, and they won't break your bones. Those whose bones are broken by crosses and afflictions, are those who are alive to the world, not dead to the world. But for one who has a mortified heart, and is dead to the world, no afflictions or troubles will break his bones; that is, they won't be very grievous or painful to the one who is mortified to the world.

This, I fear, is a mystery and riddle to many — for one to be dead to the world, to be mortified to the world. Now, it is not my work to open to you what mortification is, or death to the world is, but only this: to have our hearts so removed from the things of the world, that we use them as if we hadn't used them — not to consider that our lives, our comforts, or our happiness consist in these things. They are things that are of another nature than our happiness consists in; and we may be happy without them. *This* is a kind of deadness to the world.

The Ninth Direction

Let not men and women pore too much upon their afflictions — that is, busy their thoughts too much by looking down into their afflictions. You have many people whose thoughts are taken up entirely with what their crosses and afflictions are. They altogether think and speak of them. They are like a child who has a sore: his finger is always on the sore. And for some men and women, their thoughts are always on their afflictions. When they awake in the night, their thoughts are on their afflictions; and when they converse with others (maybe when they are praying to God), they are thinking about their afflictions. Oh! it is no marvel that you live a discontented life if your thoughts are always poring over such things. You should instead labor to have your thoughts on those things that may comfort you.

You have many who, if you propound any rule to them, to do them good, they take it well while they are with you, and thank you for it. But when they are gone, they soon forget it. It is very notable about Jacob, that when his wife died in childbirth, she called the child *Ben-oni*, that is, a *son of sorrows*. Now, Jacob thought to himself, If I were to call this child *Ben-oni*, then every time I call his name, it will remind me of the death of my dear wife, and of that affliction, and that will be a *continued* affliction to me. Therefore I will not have my child bear that name. And so the text (Gen 35.18) says that Jacob called his name Benjamin, *the son of my right hand*. Now, this is to show us that when afflictions befall us, we shouldn't give way to having our thoughts continually upon them, but rather upon those things that may stir up our thankfulness to God for mercies.

There is a comparison made by Basil,¹ a learned man. He says it is like men and women who have sore eyes: it is not good for them to always look into the fire, or at the beams of the sun. No, he says, one who has sore eyes must get things suitable for him, and look at those objects which are fit for one with such weak eyes. Therefore they get green colors, that being an easier color and better for weak eyes; and they hang a green sarsenet² before their eyes, because it is more suitable for them. It is the very same with weak spirits. A man or woman who has a weak spirit must not constantly look into the fire of their afflictions, upon those things that deject, that cast them down. But they are to look instead at what may be suitable for healing and helping them; they should be considering *those* things rather than the other. It will be of very great use and benefit to you, if you lay it to heart, not to always pore upon afflictions, but upon mercies.

¹ Basil of Caesarea (329-379), one of the "Cappadocian Fathers." He was known for his care of the poor. Basil established guidelines for monastic life, which focused on community life, prayer, and manual labor.

² *Sarsenet*: A fine soft silk fabric often used for linings.

The Tenth Direction

I beseech that you observe this direction, even if you forget many others: *Make a good interpretation of God's ways towards you*. If there can be any good interpretation made of God's ways towards you, make it. You would think it too much if you had a friend who always made bad interpretations of your ways towards him; you would take that badly. If you were to converse with people that you cannot say a word in their hearing, without them being ready to make a bad interpretation of it, and take it in a bad sense, you would think their company was very tedious. It is very tedious to the Spirit of God, when we make such bad interpretations of His ways towards us. If God deals with us other than we would have Him do, if there can be any sense worse than another made of it, we will be sure to make it. Thus, when an affliction befalls you, there may be many *good* senses made of God's works towards you. You should think this way: "It may be that God intends only to test me by this. It may be that God saw my heart was too set on the creature, and so He intends to show me what there is in my heart. It may be that God saw that if my estate continued, I would fall into sin — that the better my estate, the worse my soul would be. It may be that God intended only to exercise some grace. It may be that God intends to prepare me for some great work which he has for me." This is how you should reason.

But we, on the contrary, make bad interpretations of God's dealings with us, and say, God doesn't mean this. Surely the Lord means by this to manifest His wrath and displeasure against me. And this is but a furtherance of the evils that He intends toward me! Just as they did in the wilderness, *God has brought us here to slay us* (Deu 1.27). This is the worst interpretation that you can possibly make of God's ways. Oh! why would you make these worst interpretations, when there may be better? In 1Cor 13.5, when the Scripture speaks of love, it says, *Love thinks no evil*. Love is of that nature that if ten interpretations may be made of a thing, and nine of them are negative, and one good, Love will take that one which is good, and leave the other nine. And so, even if there might be ten interpretations presented to you concerning God's ways towards you, and if only one is good and nine negative, you should take that one that is good and leave the other nine.

I beseech 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. God is pleased to manifest his love to us in this: to make the best interpretations of what we do. And this is why God puts such a sense upon the actions of His people, that one would think it could hardly be. Such as, God is pleased to call those perfect who have only an uprightness of *heart* in them. He accounts them perfect: *Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mat 5.48); uprightness in God's sense, is perfection. Now alas, when we look into our own hearts, we can scarcely see any good there at all. And yet God is pleased to make such an interpretation as to say, *It is perfect*. When we look into our own hearts, we can see nothing but uncleanness. And yet God calls you his saints. He calls the least Christian — who has the least grace under the greatest corruption — His saint. You say we cannot be saints here; and yet in God's esteem, we *are* saints. You know the usual title that the Holy Ghost gives in several of the Epistles, to those who had *any* grace, *any* uprightness. It is, *To the saints*. You see what an interpretation God puts upon them: they are *Saints* to him. And so I might name in various other particulars, how God makes the best interpretation of things. If there is an abundance of evil and a little good, God passes by the evil, and takes notice of the good.

For that, I have sometimes made use of a very notable place in Peter, concerning Sarah. Sarah gave a title to her husband in Gen 18.12; she called him *lord*. There was only that one good word in a bad remark, an unbelieving remark.¹ Yet when the Apostle mentions it in 1Pet 3.6, the Holy Ghost leaves out all the bad, and commends her for calling her husband *lord*, for putting a reverent title upon her husband. Thus, how graciously God deals with us! If there is but one good

¹ **Gen 18:12** Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"

word among a great many bad ones, what an interpretation God makes of it! So should we. If there is only one good interpretation that we can make of a thing, then we should make use of the good one rather than the bad. Oh my brethren (I would now speak only to those who are godly), retain good thoughts of God. Take heed of judging God to be a hard master. Make good interpretations of His ways. And that is a special means to help you toward Contentment in all your courses.

The Eleventh Direction

Don't regard so much the fancies of other men, as what indeed you yourselves feel. The reason for our discontentment many times is from the fancies of other men, rather than from what we want ourselves. We think poverty is such a great evil. Why? Because it is so esteemed by others, more than what people feel about it themselves — unless they are in an extremity of poverty. I'll give you an evident demonstration that almost all the discontent in the world is from the fancies of others, rather than from the evil that is upon themselves. You may think your estates are low, and you are thereupon discontent, and it is a grievous affliction to you. But if all other men in the world were poorer than you, you wouldn't be discontent; you would rejoice in your estates, even if you didn't have a penny more than you have now. Take a man who can get but twelve pence a day, and you say, This is but a poor amount to maintain a family. But suppose no other man in the world had more than this — indeed, suppose all other men but yourselves had somewhat *less* wages than you — then you would think your condition is pretty good. You would have no more then, than you have now. Therefore, it appears by this that it is from the fancies of other men, rather than what *you* feel, that makes you think your condition is so grievous. For if all the men in the world looked at you as happy — happier than themselves — then you would be contented. Oh don't let your happiness depend on the fancies of other men. There is a saying of Chrysostom I remember, in this very case: "Let us not make the people in this case to be our lords. As we must not make men the lords of our Faith, so not the lords of our comforts." That is, that our comfort should not depend more upon their imaginations, than upon what we feel in ourselves.

It may be others think you are in an afflicted condition indeed. But I thank God that, for myself, I don't so apprehend it. Were it not for the disgrace, disesteem, and slights of other men, which is what makes my condition afflictive, my condition would not be so bad for me as it is now.

The Twelfth Direction

Don't be inordinately taken up with the comforts of this world when you have them. When you have them, don't take too much contentment in them. That is a certain rule, that however inordinate any man or woman is in sorrow when a comfort is taken from them, that immoderate they were in rejoicing in that comfort when they had it. For instance, God takes away a child, and say you are *inordinately* sorrowful — beyond what God allows in a natural or Christian way. Now, though I never knew before how your heart was towards the child, when I see this (even though you are a mere stranger to me), I may conclude without any breach of charity, that your heart was immoderately set upon your child — or your husband, or upon any other comfort that I see you grieving for when God has taken it away. If you hear bad tidings about your estates, and your hearts are dejected immoderately, and you are in a discontented way, because of such and such a cross — then certainly your hearts were immoderately set upon the world. And so likewise for your reputation. If you hear others report this or that about you, and your hearts are dejected because you think your name suffers for it, then your hearts were inordinately set upon your name and reputation. Now therefore, the way for you not to be immoderate in your sorrows for afflictions, is not to be immoderate in your love and delights when you have prosperity.

These are the principal directions for our help, that we may live quiet and contented lives.

CONCLUSION

My brethren, to conclude it all for this point, if I could tell you that I knew how to show you a way never to be in want of anything, I have no doubt we would then have many flocking to such a sermon — when a man undertakes to manifest to people how they might never be in want any more. But I have been preaching to you what amounts to as much, that which countervails this, that which in effect is the same thing. Isn't it almost the same — to never to be in want, and to never be without contentment? The man or woman who is never without a contented spirit, truly can never be said to lack much. Oh, the Word holds forth a way full of comfort and peace to the people of God, even in this world. You may live happily, even if you live in the midst of all the storms and tempests in the world. There is an ark that you may come into, where no men in the world may live such comfortable, cheerful, and contented lives as the Saints of God. Oh that we would have learned this lesson.

I have been many sermons about this Lesson of Contentment. But I am afraid that you will be longer in learning it, than I have been in preaching about it. It is a harder thing to learn it than it is to preach or speak of it. I remember I read about one man reading from that passage in Psalm 39, *I will take heed that I not offend with my tongue*. He said, "I have been these thirty-eight years learning this lesson, and haven't learned it thoroughly." The truth is, there are many (I am afraid) who have been professors nearly thirty-eight years, and have hardly learned this lesson. It would be a good lesson for young professors to begin to learn early on.

But now, this lesson of Christian Contentment is just as hard. And perhaps you may be many years in learning it. I am afraid there are some Christians who haven't yet learned *not to offend grossly with their tongues*. The Scripture says, *All a man's religion is in vain, if he cannot bridle his tongue* (Jas 1.26). Therefore, of those who make any profession of godliness, one would think they should quickly learn this lesson. It is such a lesson that, unless learned, it makes all their religion vain. But as for this lesson of Christian Contentment, it may take *more* time to learn. And there are many who are learning it all the days of their lives, and yet are not Proficients.

But God forbid that it should be said of any of us concerning this lesson, as the Apostle says of widows in 2Tim 3.7, *They were ever learning and never came to the knowledge of the truth*. Oh let us not be ever learning this Lesson of Contentment, and yet never come to have skill in it. You would think it much if you had used the sea twenty years, and yet have attained no skill in your art of navigation. You would prefer to say, I have used the sea twenty or thirty years, and I hope I know by this time what belongs to the sea. O that you would but say so in respect to the Art of Christianity! When there is anything that's spoken concerning the duty of a Christian, O that Christians could but say, I have been a Christian this long, and I hope I am not lacking in a thing that is so necessary for a Christian. Here is a necessary Lesson for a Christian, which Paul stated: *He had learned in all estates, to be content with them*. Oh, don't be content with yourselves till you have learned this lesson of Christian Contentment, and gotten some better skill in it than you had before.

Now in the text there is another lesson, which is a hard lesson: *I have learned to abound*. That doesn't so nearly concern us at this time, because the times are afflictive times; and there is now (more than ordinarily) an uncertainty in all things in the world. In such times as these, there are few who have such an abundance, that they need to be taught much in that lesson.

FINIS

The Saints' Duty in Times of Extremity

*Occasioned upon the news of extraordinary loss
to the Parliament's forces in the west, Sun., Aug. 21, 1644.*¹

Exo 14.13

Stand still, and see the Salvation of the Lord.

What the certainty is of the cause of those fears that are upon the hearts of people, is not yet apparent; but that there *are* many disquieting fears in their hearts, *that* is apparent to the full. And therefore, though I prepared for that ordinary course as formerly; yet for this time, I desire that you turn to that Scripture, so that I might speak a word in season.

The beginning of the verse is thus, *And Moses said to the people, fear not, stand still and see the Salvation of the Lord.* In the previous chapter, we have Pharaoh dismissing Israel out of Egypt. In this chapter, we have him pursuing Israel with a newly heated fury, against all common sense and reason. His malice and rage besotted him, because God intended to destroy him. Though God's hand appeared gloriously for His people before, yet Pharaoh would not see the majesty of the Lord; but he *will* see it. He gathers all the strength he possibly can, and seems too rash in his way. He overtakes; and he overtakes them in a place of the greatest advantage that could possibly be. For the text says that they were before Pi-hahiroth, in the first verse, between Migdol and the Sea, against Baal-zephon — and that was by God's appointment too.

Migdol signifies a tower; so that, in that place the Egyptians had likewise built a tower. Besides the advantage of the rocks, and of the hills, there was a tower built for their further strengthening. And there the people of Israel were an unarmed people. Not only were they by the Tower, but they were against Baal-zephon.

I remember in the last sermon, I showed you what *Baal* was, and what several *Baals* there were that the heathens worshipped for their gods. It is a general name that is sometimes used for any other idol. This *Baal-zephon* was a god they worshipped on this ground; they had an idol set in that place, upon going out of Egypt, that was to watch those who were going out. For so *zephon* comes from *zuri speculatus est* — the god who was to watch, who was to stand and watch for any runaway servant, or any people who left Egypt without leave. They were trusting in the Baal, that he would stop them, and keep them; and he was set in that place for that very purpose. Thereupon, his name was Baal-zephon. By their magic arts, conjurers would have their spells and spirits stop men in such a place, so they won't go out of an orchard, or a yard they enter. So the Egyptians, by their magical arts, had (as it were) a spell there, a Baal-zephon, a god to stop people in that place where they would have them stopped. That is the meaning of this name of the idol *Baal-zephon*.

So that, you see what a strait Israel was in upon going out of Egypt. The sea was before them, the Egyptians had all their strength behind — in a hole of rocks, and a tower, and their god to stop them altogether — so that they themselves made sure of them, and said they were entangled in the land of the wilderness. Being in those great straits, their hearts began to fail them; they began to be extremely troubled, and in a most grievous distemper of spirit. They were coming and chiding with Moses, and said to him in the 11th verse, *Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us to die in the wilderness? Why therefore have you dealt this way with us, to carry us out of Egypt?* We would rather have continued in Egypt still. What! Brought to these straits! These extremities! Such a perplexity as we are now in! We would to God that we had been in Egypt. This was the baseness of their spirits; they would rather be under vile bondage, than

¹ This sermon was given during the English Civil Wars (1642-1651). *Restormel Castle*, the site of the battle, remained in Royalist hands until the following year. After the Battle of Naseby (June 1645), the Royalist cause was lost, and Parliamentary forces commenced an assault on the South West. Restormel Castle was evacuated by the Royalists as they retreated to the West. That was just before Burroughs gave his series of sermons, labelled by others as the *Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. This sermon was included in the 1651 edition of that work.

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endure any hazard, than to be put to any straits and difficulties. It is the baseness of the spirits of many today among us, because they see that those ways that have been taken by the Parliament bring some trouble from difficulties, some straits. They cry out about the times. I would to God that we were as before; we were well enough before; we were quiet enough before; we never knew what such stirs as these meant before; but now we are brought into these perplexities. *They* have brought us into this; and thus they are ready to murmur and repine. Oh unthankful, unworthy generation — men and women of vile spirits who will do so.

It was a speech of Cyrus, speaking to his soldiers. The historian has this expression of his. *It is the part of a true valiant man, either to live honorably, or die honorably, as one of them. But that is the part of a base coward — to be under any base servitude, rather than to be in any hazard of their lives, though perhaps their lives may be saved too.* I remember Philo tells us, even of women (for in our times, the public cause of the Kingdom suffers exceedingly by the timorousness¹ of the spirits of women), that being in danger of being brought into bondage by their enemies, they took their children and threw them into the rivers, with these words, *You shall not serve; we would rather see you die than be slaves.* I don't commend the fact that it was done well, but to show what a spirit the heathen women had to see their children die, rather than have them bond-slaves.

Indeed, what were our lives worth? Were they worth having, if we return to our bondage again? The utmost of the danger is our lives, the killing of our bodies; and yet we hope God will preserve them too. But suppose the worst, it is but death. But if our lives should not be hazarded now, and if through base cowardice we should decline the cause of God, surely our lives would not be worth taking up. Living in that manner, is to live in bondage to these Cavaliers,² notorious wretches, blasphemers of God himself, which would make our lives worth very little — no, it is your children perhaps to be brought up in popery, and to hold a candle to a mass priest at the altar. That may be the employment of your children if so be that they live.

But these people [the Israelites], now being in this extremity, and manifesting so much passion, being in a distemper, Moses as the Captain of the Lord, comes to the people and speaks bravely to them, encouraging them. Says Moses, *Fear not, but stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. Stand still;* the Hebrew word is *yatsab* — *state*; it signifies to settle and compose, to be in a settled condition. It is a reflect word upon ourselves; so the learned know that it is to work upon ourselves, to *form*; it signifies so. It is the same as if he said, Work upon your own hearts, to get your hearts to *stand still*; work upon your hearts to do that; work arguments upon your spirits, and never stop working until you have wrought your hearts into such a frame that you may *stand still*, and be quiet. At first, even the dearest servants of God will find their hearts shake in time of hazards and extremities. But once they come to work upon their spirits, to bring arguments to lay to their hearts, they get some advantage there, so that their hearts grow quiet quickly.

For that, we have a notable text in the example of David, in Psalm 62. David says there, in the 1st and 2nd verses, *Truly my soul waits upon God; from Him comes my salvation; He only is my Rock and my salvation; He is my defence, I shall not be greatly moved.* Mark that he begins to exercise faith; and he says he shall not be greatly moved, as if he had said, I confess, I cannot say but that my heart is somewhat stirred; I am somewhat afraid, and I feel some working in my spirit. But I hope I shall not be greatly moved. He falls to working more upon his heart, and considers

¹ *Timorousness*: fear of the unknown, or of venturing into new and unknown places or activities.

² *Cavaliers* were Royalist cavalry, fighting for King Charles I during the English Civil Wars. The Cavaliers opposed the Roundheads, who supported Parliament. Cavaliers were aristocrats. They wore their hair long, and dressed in finery on the battlefield. Roundheads cut their hair short and dressed plainly. The aristocrats had a certain unimpressed attitude (they were *cavalier*) towards those they considered their *inferiors*. Those same inferiors refused to bend the knee to them, and proved their equality on the battlefield. When the Republican rabble finally defeated the aristocrats, Oliver Cromwell showed his disdain for the British class system by executing the king. He was therefore hated and feared by the aristocracy. Their contempt for him continues to this day in England. Americans, by contrast, see Cromwell as a champion of the common man, and of representative government — a precursor to their own Revolution in 1776.

his innocence, and the mischievous device of the ungodly. *How long will you imagine mischief against a man; you shall be slain, all of you* (v. 3). Then again, in the 5th verse, *My soul, wait only upon God, for my expectation is from Him; He only is my Rock*. And then he repeats the words again, after he had been rubbing upon his heart the same meditation. Then he fetches the words again that he had in the 2nd verse: *He only is my Rock and my salvation*.

But mark now, what advantage he gets of himself, in the 6th verse. *He only is my Rock and my salvation, and my defence; I shall not be moved*. After he had been working further on his own heart, he then gains and says now, *He is my Rock, and my salvation, and my defence; I shall not be moved*. I have overcome these distracting fears; I've gotten the advantage and the victory; blessed be God, I have overcome them! God is my salvation and my glory. Now he begins to glory and triumph after he had worked upon himself. So that, in this he did indeed stand still in this phrase, by working upon his own heart. Though he was little stirred at first, yet he got the victory. So indeed, not to be moved, the seventy¹ render this word stand still, *stete* only.² Yet in their notes on it, they say it is likewise read *stetite*; that is, *standing fast*, or stand fast. It is a word taken from soldiers in their ranks. Soldiers who are in their ranks, when they apprehend danger, know it would cost them their lives to step out of line; they must stand; they must *stand still*. However much danger there is, they must *stand still in their ranks*. That is the meaning of the word. I will open more what is meant by the Holy Ghost by and by, what kind of *stand still* this should be. But as for this word itself, it is such a *stand still* as the soldiers have in their ranks, not to go out of their ranks for fear.

The word is used in Scripture at various times for *standing fast*, as in Philippians 1.27, that you stand fast in one spirit. Now, the word *fast* is not in the Greek text, but only the other word. And so you have the same word in the other Scriptures. In 1Corinthians 16.13, *Watch, stand fast in the faith* — the word is *stetite*; it is only two words in the Greek, as it is in the English: stand fast. So that, this *stand* means not only standing, but standing fast; stand still in your ranks, *fast*. Don't be in a hurry up and down; and don't be in confusion. If upon danger, soldiers in the army were quickly put to confusion, what would become of them? And so the truth is, in a city, in any place where there is danger, if people grow into confusion, they are gone; they are lost. You must stand still in your ranks; *stand still*.

There are several *stand stills*; some very vile and naughty, and others very good. Here is the first.

1. *Stand still out of amazement*. This is when a man through fear is at a standstill, and dares not stir any further. Now, this cannot be meant in this text, for Moses says, *Fear not, but stand still*. Therefore it isn't standing still out of fear because we're astonished (shocked).

2. *There is standing still out of ignorance*. It is because we don't know which way to take; but this is not in the text either. Thus many in our time, standing still, plead ignorance. They stand still, and will take no side, pleading ignorance. They don't know what to do, for one says one thing, and another says another thing. The King commands one thing, and the Parliament another. They don't know what to do. To go against the King, isn't that rebellion? And so they stand still because they plead ignorance, and their consciences are not informed.

It has been the work of various Ministers who have hazarded themselves in this, to open to you the Counsel of God, and to set your consciences at liberty. I have said diverse things in this place, but certainly men blind their own eyes, and are willing to stand still, to plead ignorance after so much light is revealed. It is strange that any rational man should speak of rebellion now, when as we know, the King himself sent aid to the *Rochellers*, and we know in the case of their liberties and religion, they took up arms to defend themselves against their own King. And he sent help to

¹ The *Seventy* is a nickname for the Septuagint, the translation of the Old Testament by seventy Jewish scholars, from Hebrew to Greek. It is the version often quoted by Christ in the New Testament.

² That is the word typeset in this edition; but in the NT the Greek is *steko*, and Psa 62.6 in the LXX it is *steusoo*.

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them. Surely he didn't himself take them to be rebels. And King James in his answer to Byron that inveighs against the Protestants in France, serves to justify what the Protestants in France did — even King James himself in that book of his, in his answer to Byron.¹

And besides, we would have to acknowledge that all the Protestant churches in the world are rebels, if it is rebellion merely to take up arms. Don't we know that our own King has matched his daughter to the young Prince of Orange? ² Now, we know the Prince of Orange is the General of the States in their fields, just as the Earl of Essex is the General of our forces here. And it was their business against the King of Spain (to their praise) to defend their liberties and religion; and they still maintain the same quarrel.³ And the Prince of Orange is their General, and he undertakes it.

We desire nothing but the maintenance of our liberty and our religion, though things have not gone so far yet, as to have our estates taken. Yet the cause that *they* began with, is *our* cause. And what the General was there, is the same in kind here (there is not a great difference). And certainly, if it were a rebellion, our king would never have matched his daughter ⁴ to the son of such a rebel — not if it were rebellion merely to take up arms to defend religion, and to defend the liberties of the country, which are liberties according to law. Indeed, we know further that the King himself has acknowledged our brethren, the *Scots*, to be *loving* subjects, to be his *loyal* subjects. And are we doing any more than they did? ⁵ Are we doing more in our cause? In fact, have we done so much in *our* cause, as *they* have done? How was it generally in their kingdom? And will it be acknowledged that they are loving subjects, doing so much as they did, and yet we be accounted rebels? Surely no man can plead to stand still through ignorance on *that* ground.

3. *There is a third stand still.* The truth is, though it isn't through ignorance, it is through a worse principle, and that is of *neutralizing*. That is, when men, though they are informed well enough, yet they stand still to see which will be the strongest side. They are loth to appear yet, not knowing which side will most prevail. But they have such a principle in their spirits, to go to the strongest side (whichever it may be), that they stand still till it becomes apparent. My brethren, certainly we can allow no *Neuters* in these times. The times have grown to a greater height than for any to be admitted as a Neuter — either for us or against us. Whatever is not for us at this time, now coming to this strait, may well be concluded to be against us.

4. *There is a fourth stand still*, and this is one of *sullenness of spirit*; and that is more particular. It is true of many men and women, especially those who are in some troubles of conscience, and when they are seeking of God, and performing duties that God requires of them. But not finding

¹ Charles I sent a fleet of 80 ships, to encourage a major rebellion in La Rochelle France, a Huguenot stronghold against the Catholics under Louis XIV. In June 1627, Buckingham landed with 6,000 men to help the persecuted Huguenots. It began the Anglo-French War of 1627. The reference is to King James I, and probably Sir John Byron of Newstead Abbey; both died in 1625. Byron's son John (1599-1652) served Charles I in the Civil War, and was made Baron.

² This is William II (1626-1650), Prince of Orange. His only child would become William III, King of England, Ireland, and Scotland, in "The Glorious Revolution" of 1688.

³ Referring to the Eighty Year's War (1568-1648), or the Dutch War of Independence. It was a revolt of the Seventeen Provinces (today known as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg), against Philip II of Spain, who was the sovereign over the Habsburg Netherlands.

⁴ Speaking of Mary, *Princess Royal* (1631-1660), first daughter of King Charles I. The king thought it beneath her to marry Prince William, but financial and political troubles required it. They were betrothed in 1641 (she was 10). Their only child, William (William III), married his cousin Mary, the fifteen-year-old daughter of Charles II's brother James, Duke of York. Orange, curiously, is a province in the south of France on the Rhone; but that's another story...

⁵ Referring to the Bishops Wars of 1639 and 1640, disputes over control and governance of the Kirk of Scotland. In 1637 Charles I attempted to impose uniform practices between the Kirk and the Church of England. Charles favored rule by bishops, while the Scots advocated a presbyterian system. The 1638 National Covenant pledged to oppose these innovations; and the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland voted to expel the bishops. When Charles resorted to force, the "Covenanters" (Presbyterian Scots) defeated the Royalist forces (Catholic Scots) in Aberdeenshire, in 1639. Then they defeated an English army in 1640, leaving the Covenanters in control of Scotland. As a postscript, three weeks after this sermon was given by Burroughs, the Royalists defeated the Covenanters at Aberdeen, Sept. 13, 1644.

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that encouragement that their hearts desire, they quit all, and have no mind to do anything except to stand still and die. They will even sink into a sullen discouragement, and go no further, quit their work, and quit duty. *Why should I keep on doing my duty, for I get no good by it? I am never a whit better.* And so they stand still out of a sullen discouragement. The devil himself is the most discouraged Spirit in the world; and yet he is the proudest Spirit in the world. And this standing still out of discouragement may come from pride, and a haughty heart, though you think it is out of humility.

5. *There is a sluggish standing still*, which is sinful and wicked. It is when people stand still because they are idle, and loth to risk themselves, or to put themselves to any trouble, to go forward in any work, for the work is tedious. And thus the sluggard stands still, and is ready to snatch at any arguments that may plead for his standing still. My brethren, this is not that *stand still* here in the text, that we should stand still and do nothing, and be sluggards. No, rather the *stand still* here is after we have gone on, and done to the utmost what we are able, that *then* we should stand still and commit the work to God, as if we had done nothing at all. There is the *stand still* that I will speak more about shortly.

As that worthy divine said, he would labor to preach as if he expected no assistance, and then he would expect assistance as if he had not labored at all. So warriors and people in danger, should prepare in the use of all means, as if they expected no further help; and then they should expect help from God, as if they had used no means at all; so we must use means. ^{Neh 4.9} As that brave speech of Joab, *Come let us play the men, let us fight for our cities, and the people of our God; and then let God do what seems good to Him.* ^{2Sam 10.12} Then he stood still and looked for his salvation from God. This is a speech even of Joab himself; it is not then a sluggish stand still. It is no hindrance at all to any preparations that may be used: therefore all these are nothing.

6. *There is an obediential stand still*; that is, for the hearts of men and women to stand still, to wait, to know further of God's mind. What God reveals, our hearts are willing to yield to. And we will listen to hear what the mind of God further is, what God would have us do — to stand still in order to hearken to what the Lord would have us do, with hearts resigned up to Him, and resolved to walk accordingly. This is good, and that is something of it; but that is not all.

7. *There is a stand still out of Faith, a believing stand still.* And that is when (even in the greatest extremity), having used whatever means we can for helping us, we yet see ourselves wrapped up in extremity. I will now exercise Faith.

(1.) First, *to quiet my heart*; to get out of my spirit those distracting thoughts of that hurry and tumult that there is in the heart, and to silence it all — all murmurings, all distractions, all giddiness of spirit, and the uproar that many times is in the hearts of men and women in time of danger. So by Faith I come to quiet these, and to get my heart to be still within me. Be still O my soul; and therefore the Scripture expresses this waiting upon God out of Faith, as a word of silence. See Psalm 62 at the beginning, and verse 5, *My soul waits upon God; it is silenced* — so the Hebrew word signifies: silence in God. Many times, there is in the hearts of men and women (when they apprehend any danger) a great deal of hurrying and noise in their hearts. All is a combustion in their hearts; it is a grievous thing to see a city in combustion, enflamed and in a tumult. There are many men and women whose hearts are in as great a tumult upon the apprehension of danger, as many times a whole city is in tumult. There is a rising in their hearts, and a mighty noise there. Sometimes they keep their tongues silent (perhaps in private or public exigencies); but their hearts boil within them. But *your hearts must be silent.* You must cry out to your heart, *Be silent there!* My heart is now in mutiny, and a great deal of stir: Cry *Silence!* to your heart, that your heart and thoughts may be composed. That is the meaning of the word, that there should be a settled composed frame of spirit in the hearts of men and women in times of extremity. That is the first.

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(2.) Secondly, When standing still is done out of Faith, we should *keep our stations till God calls us out*. We are not to run up and down, this way and that, and to think of nothing but shifting courses, to shift for ourselves. As in time of danger (I truly believe) if we could look into the thoughts of many men and women, they scarcely have any thought, but merely of shifting their place or house. They think to shift for themselves. Now, we should not busy our thought so much about shifting, as about quieting our hearts in believing. For (my brethren) in times of extremity of danger, God calls for courage more than discretion.¹ Though it is true, discretion is not excluded, yet that is not the explicit and special work that is called for in times of danger; I mean discretion to shift for yourselves, but discretion so far as it may improve courage. The main work that God now calls for at this time, is courage, and discretion, and prudence, only so far as to manage courage, and to drive it on further; and to improve and not abate it — this is certainly not the discretion that is called for now, but to keep our station.

Question. But you may say, *In time of danger, may we not flee? Must men keep their stations? Is it not lawful to avoid danger and to flee? Then we will accuse many of our brethren who before now have fled in time of danger.*

Answer. (My brethren) you are to know that the case now is far different from the case that existed before. The case before now was especially (for the present) directed against particular men, not against the general populace, though there were plots against the general. But the hazard and the danger was against such and such particular men, especially your Ministers, who were most faithful and conscionable. They were the forefront; they bore the brunt of it, and it was aimed especially against them. Now the case is far different. When the aim of the Adversary is against particular men, they may use all lawful means, by avoiding and fleeing. When it is against the body in general, then everyone should stand still, and keep in their ways and stations; to come in and add whatever strength they can to the public cause. And certainly those who shift then, and think to flee then, God may justly meet with them.

We read of this with Jeremiah and Urijah (Jer 26.20-24). Urijah the Priest flees in public time of danger, and he was sent for, and caught, and put to death. Jeremiah stays and is saved. But when the case is the danger of particular persons, then it says nothing against this text in Exodus, to flee in times of danger, because they think they may shift from fleeing themselves. And if others who are in danger should not do so, they would be far enough from helping and assisting those in extremities, and yet they will be crying out against it. Peter Martyr ² I remember has this answer to it:

It is just for all the world in this case. It is like a man with a dangerous sickness, and the physicians tell him there is no way to cure it except by taking such strong medicine, or by cutting off a leg or a limb. Now he comes and pleads, *I will not so distrust God, and be so impatient of my present pain, as to take such a course to help me. I'd rather continue patient and quiet, and endure my present pain, and trust in God, rather than put myself to any such hazard.*

Now, is this man more patient than another man who *would* take such strong medicine, or have a member cut off? Is it through the strength of his patience? No, it is rather through the weakness of his spirit, because the other is certain of great pain and hazard; and while he goes on in the use of ordinary means, he has a lesser pain, with the hope that he may be delivered from greater pain, and be preserved.

¹ As in, "*discretion is the better part of valor.*" Such discretion might cause us to quit the field as a prudent choice, to preserve life and limb. But, says Burroughs, this isn't the time for such discretion; we need courage to *stand still*.

² Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562) Italian-born Reformed theologian. His early work as a reformer in Catholic Italy, and his decision to flee for Protestant northern Europe, influenced many other Italians to convert and flee as well. In England, he influenced the Reformation, and contributed to the 1552 Book of Common Prayer.

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So this is the objection against fleeing a particular danger: because in fleeing, great suffering is *certain*. Those who have fled have found it so. Now, others would satisfy themselves to endure a little *uncertain* suffering, rather than endure a certain great suffering; that is the very ground of it. But to show that this is not against Faith at all — to flee in danger when it is *particularly* aimed at *particular* persons — I'll give you but a Scripture or two to clear it up.

We might spend a great deal of our time in this case here, but have done with it. It is remarkable in Matthew 10.23, that Christ says, *When they persecute you in this city, flee to another*. He speaks of particular persecution of this or that body, and not of a whole kingdom. Now flee, (they say), we will be more believing, and trust in God, and not be afraid; have we not a good cause, and isn't God with us? This would argue too much fear. Note in the next words that Christ speaks after he gave them liberty, and commanded them to flee, he says (verse 26), *Do not fear them therefore* (though it is the next thing he speaks of in verse 28), *and do not fear those who kill the body*. You see these two can well stand together. There is no fear of those who can kill the body, and yet there is a fleeing. And so Christ himself flees in Matthew 12, when he but heard what Herod did to John (when Jesus knew it, that was when the Pharisees sought him), when he knew it, he withdrew himself, verses 12-13. *And when Jesus heard of it, he departed from there*, etc. When he but heard what was done to John, Christ withdrew himself and went away. Therefore it may stand with Faith, to so avoid danger in particular cases. But now, when persecution is general, we are to *stand still*, and not avoid our station.

(3.) The *third thing* about standing still in Faith, is *looking up for the salvation of God*, expecting a good outcome one way or another. I don't know how salvation will come, but that there be salvation, one way or another, is what my soul rests upon. I don't stand still out of haughtiness of spirit, or because I think I have means enough to resist. Whether I have means or not, when I am put into the greatest extremity, I can yet *stand still*, and look for salvation. What!? *Stand still*, and look for the salvation of the Lord? Why do you talk of salvation (they might say to Moses) when there is nothing but destruction before us? True, if you look before you, behind you, and without you, and within yourselves, there is nothing but destruction. Yet, look up to Heaven, and *there* is salvation. *Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord*.

I have done no more than the opening of the text, and what is contained in it. There are these four *Doctrinal Conclusions* in the text:

Doctrine 1. When God is in a way of mercy and salvation to His people, he many times brings them into great straits, even then, even when He is in a way of salvation.

Doctrine 2. In the time of these great straits, even the people of God are subject to have their hearts be overwhelmed with trouble, distracting fears, and to be disquieted.

Doctrine 3. It is our duty to stand still, keep quiet, and look for God's salvation in the time of the greatest straits.

Doctrine 4. The sight of God's salvation coming after straits, is a glorious sight to behold. Stand still, see the salvation of God.

These are the four. Take the first, then.

DOCTRINE 1. *First, when God is in a way of salvation, He yet may and does at various times, bring His people into very great straits.* Truly, this strait in the text is exceedingly remarkable. But I'll show you what God further did when He was about to save this people Israel out of the Egyptian bondage, *after* they were delivered from this strait, from Pharaoh and all his host. This is the work God now has to do with us, to save us out of the Egyptian bondage that we were in, and that we were going further into. You'll find in Exodus chapter 15, the very next chapter, that after they had come out of the sea, they presently wanted water to drink. But *the waters were so bitter, they could not drink them* (Exo 15.15). They were ready to perish for lack of water. As soon

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as they were delivered out of that strait, note in the 16th chapter, they were in another strait as bad as that. You'll find they lacked bread, and were ready to starve from hunger (Exo 16.2-3). *And all the assembly were ready to be killed for hunger* (the text says). Well, Moses cries to God, and God delivered them out of that strait too. In the next chapter, they were also in as great a strait. *They pitched at Rephidim, and there they had no water to drink again.*

I might go through the story, and show you in the wilderness, what great straits God put them in, and yet God was working salvation for them. But I won't; time will not permit.

When they came to possess the land, they have the Jordan to pass over, without any bridge. Whether the bridges were cut down, or there were none, I cannot tell. But it was more danger to pass over the bridges (if there were any), because it was at the time (the text says, Jos 3.15) that the *Jordan flooded over all its banks*. So then, it was at the worst time that could be, when the banks of the Jordan were all overflowed; and yet God delivered them out of that strait.

When they had gotten over there, I might show you many other straits. But I will mention only one, and it was this: the first enemy the people of God fought with in Canaan, they were discomfited; they were beaten back at the first battle they ever fought ¹ — when they came to set upon the land of Canaan, and to fight with the adversary. The adversary comes out and gets the day, and makes them flee before them. That was at the fight at Ai. *They fled before the men of Ai* (7.4). Upon this, Joshua fell down upon the ground. Why Lord? What, have we come to this? After all these straits, now that we come to fight with the people of Canaan, and at the very first blow, they have the day, and make us flee before them? Now all the people will come out against us.

If these people have such distracting fears now, suppose there were a meeting of both armies, and you heard that one army fled before another — say that our men fled before those who come out against them, before the Cavaliers — what fear and distraction would there be then? Yet, so it was with the people of Israel, though God was coming in with such a mighty hand to deliver them, and to give them possession of Canaan. Still, at the very first blow, they had the worst, and the people of Ai overcame them.

It would take a great deal of time to show you the straits that David, and Josiah, and Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah were in. I'll only give you a word or two about David, because it may be a very great help to poor troubled spirits in time of straits. David was in such straits sometimes, that he professes he was *overwhelmed*, Psa 61.2. You'll find in Psa 77.4, that *he could not speak*. Many poor souls are in grievous afflictions, and when we urge them to do and open their heart to God and men, *Oh I cannot speak* (they say). David was in such straits that he could not speak; indeed, *he could not so much as look up*, Psa 40.12 — not so much as look up to God, such grievous straits was he in.

And the people of Israel, in their captivity, there were *mountains* before them. What straits did God put them into? When they had come out of Babylon, in Zec 4.7, *What are you O great mountain, that are before them?* But examples will be needless to illustrate the thing, it is so clear that thus was God's dealing with His people. As with wicked men, when God is in a way of wrath against the ungodly, He many times permits them to prosper in the highest way, with the most flourishing prosperity they ever had in their lives. So too, when He is in a way of salvation for his saints, He lets them be in the lowest ebb they were ever in, in all their lives. As in Job 20.22, the text says, *In the fullness of his sufficiency, he will be in straits*. In the fullness of his sufficiency — what a phrase is here! A wicked man will be in straits when he is full, when he has sufficient (he thinks); in the fullness of his sufficiency he will be in straits. And on the other side, a godly man in his greatest straits, has a fullness of sufficiency.

¹ At Jericho, in Joshua 6, there was no open battlefield or opposing army, only skirmishes within its fallen walls.

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I will show you this clearly in 2Cor 1.5, *As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ*. We have a fullness of consolation when we have a fullness of suffering. Yes, we not only abound, but super-abound, for so the word is found in 2Cor 7.4. *I am* (he says) *filled with comfort; I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulations*. We're brought into tribulation, into great straits, and I have a fullness filled with comforts, and *exceedingly* joyful, more than abundantly joyful. So the word signifies. There is *abounding* in the other text, but here it has *super* added to it — a *super-abounding*, more than joyful, and not in prosperity only. Carnal hearts never know how to rejoice except in times of prosperity, when they can eat, and drink, and play; *then* they can be merry. But the saints know how to joy, how to be *filled* with joy, how to *abound* in joy, and how to *exceedingly* abound in joy, when they are in tribulation. Thus, just as wicked men are in straits in their sufficiency, so godly men, when God is in a way of comfort, may be in a way of great affliction. And the reasons for this may be,

Reason 1. *Because God would humble His people when He is in a way of salvation*. When God intends the greatest good to His people, and to raise them the highest, He is very careful to keep them very low. That has always been the manner of God's administrations. You see the reason for the people having straits in the wilderness. God gives it here in Deu 8.2, *You shall remember all the way, which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness* — to what end? Why were they so long in the wilderness? It was (says the text) *to humble them*. I brought you into the wilderness, and it was to humble you.

Does God (my brethren) bring us into straits now, in these times? Certainly, He is in a way of salvation for England. He is in a way of salvation to do us good in the latter end; yet He is bringing us into straits. Oh! we may thank the pride of our spirits, that we have not been brought low enough to this very day. There has been (indeed) some humiliation of some of the people of God, in fasting and praying; they have humbled their souls. But yet, though there have been humble expressions, yet there are not humble hearts. For after those times, they have had (many of them) exceedingly froward spirits. And apparently it argues that their hearts aren't humbled and broken, when their spirits, after days of humiliation, are still as froward and pettish as before. But it argues especially for the majority of the Kingdom, for how far we are from being a humbled people! We are not yet capable of whatever mercy God intends for us in this regard, because we are not humbled. Oh, the exceeding pettishness, envy, and pride (and a great deal worse) not only in many people of the land, but even in those who are godly and gracious!

How opposite are the spirits of men, of one brother to another! And that is because there is some difference in judgment in such and such a thing. O, they could be content (many of them) to have them rid out of the land; and if God did not prevent it (whereas the persecution by Bishops is now at an end), who knows (unless God humbles their hearts more) whether many of God's dear servants, who but differ in some point of judgment, might not meet with a great deal of suffering, even from those who are godly. And that is the worst suffering. It is better to suffer a thousand times from wicked men — it is not so hard on the spirits of godly men to suffer from however many Bishops and wicked men — as to suffer from one godly man. Oh! there lacks that charity and tenderness of spirit, one towards another, that there ought to be. We are not yet humbled and brought to our knees. And therefore it is just for God to lay us on our backs awhile, or that we should even be with our faces on the ground, and confounded in our own thoughts, before that great salvation comes that God intends for us. That's the first reason.

Reason 2. *God brings us to straits because He takes great delight in the exercise of faith*. My beloved, faith is a most glorious grace; it is one of the most glorious things that ever God enabled any creature to do, and especially now, when there is so much guilt upon them. It is a more glorious work than Adam performed in Innocency. For a poor creature to believe upon God for his good here, and to rely upon Him in the midst of all extremities, is a most glorious work, and

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God is exceedingly delighted in it. And therefore the Scripture calls faith, *precious faith*, in the beginning of 2Peter (2Pet 1.1).

Now, God loves the acting of precious things. God loves to see the actings of all His creatures, every creature active in its way. But when God has put such a precious grace as faith into the heart, O how God delights to see the acting of that precious faith! And therefore it has been the way of God to go quite crosswise after the Lord has made a promise of mercy and salvation. He goes seemingly crosswise, only to exercise our faith. I think I have told sometimes about that with regard to Abraham, that there were but two promises made to him. First, that the country that God would give him, would flow with milk and honey (Gen 12.7; Exo 13.5). And secondly, that his seed would be as the stars of heaven (Gen 15.5). And mark which way God brings this about. As soon as he gets into Canaan, he nearly starved there (Gen 12.10). Is this the country that flows with milk and honey? And then, for the other, his seed would be as the stars of heaven. He waited twenty years before he had a child; and Isaac waited twenty years before *he* had a child¹ — and yet his seed would be great. And Isaac must be killed too (Gen 22.1). And then there was another thing that exercised his faith. God would give him the land; and yet notwithstanding this, during his lifetime he didn't possess even one foot of the land, but only a burial place (Gen 23.9). And what was the reason for all this? It was to exercise his faith.

And there is the promise God makes to his Son Christ, *I will give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession* (Psa 2.8). Yet Christ did not have a hole to hide his head in; he didn't have so much as foxes and birds have, to hide his head in (Mat 8.20). Thus the way of God seems quite contrary, so that He might draw out that glorious work of faith that He so much delights in. And because this is the only time to exercise this precious grace, and there will be no such faith as this exercised in heaven, God therefore (because He would have as much of the excellence of this faith as possible), even though He is in a way of salvation — He brings his people into straits.

Reason 3. *Because the Lord delights so much in the prayers of His people, that He might draw out their prayers.* Oh! the voice is sweet; the voice of prayer is very melodious in the ears of God. It's true, God delights in a praising voice too. But here in this world, He rather delights in prayer. Why? Because God will have a praising voice to all eternity. God's saints will be *praising* Him to all eternity; but they will not be *praying* to Him to all eternity. For now — delighting so much in the praying voice of his saints, and knowing that He will have a great deal of praise from His people when they are delivered from great troubles — it is no marvel that God exercises His people. What pleases God more than heaven and earth, is the exercise of faith, and the prayers of His people. They are the most pleasing things to God in all the world. And therefore He brings us into straits.

Reason 4. *Because God would reveal wicked men.* Before He brings his great salvation, He would reveal those who are vile and wicked, so that they would not partake of that glorious salvation. As in our times, we know how God — in every strait that we have been in — has made some useful revelation to us. It has been a time to discover many whom we now know to be vile and naughty, that we did not know before. Luk 2.35 (you know the place), *A sword shall pierce through your soul* — Why? — *that the thoughts of many may be revealed.* There will be great afflictions and troubles, and the end I am at is to reveal the thoughts of many. How have men's thoughts been revealed by plots? When God was bringing His people into Canaan, He would not have a rebellious generation come in among them, and cause trouble as they had in the wilderness. It was by a mixture of a base and vile generation, that you see plainly in Numbers 11. This is when

¹ Burroughs originally said that Isaac waited 40 years for a child. But Isaac married at 40 (Gen 25.20), and had Jacob at 60 (Gen 25.26). So I changed it to 20 years. I suspect this sermon was given verbally, and recorded shorthand.

they were in such a distressed condition, and in a murmuring and vexing way. Note verse 4, *The mixed multitude that was among them, fell into lusting*. They disturbed all the host of God.

And certainly, if such men are not revealed more than they are, if God were to come to set up a full reformation among us here in England, to bring us to that Canaan (that Promised Land) we desire, then we would be so troubled with a mixed multitude — the mixed multitude would so vex and trouble the Church of God — that they would scarcely ever have peace among themselves. And therefore God in His mercy reveals them beforehand — *before Canaan comes*, He will reveal this mixed multitude.

Reason 5. God brings them into straits, *because he would give occasion to the Adversary to vent his malice to the utmost, and to ripen his sin, that it may be ripe to the full before God comes to deliver us* — that these adversaries might be gathered together to be a great sacrifice to the Lord.¹ Therefore God's people are brought to such straits, that if they blaspheme, they will blaspheme to the full.

In our times now, the more straits we are brought into, the greater are the blasphemies of the wicked. And if God should bring us into more straits, and give them the better over us, I believe there will be that horrible blasphemy in England, that was never found anywhere in the world, that the heavens never heard, nor did the earth ever bear such blasphemies (and blasphemers) as there would be if God but delivered up His people in any degree, to the hand of their enemies. We don't know if, for the ripening of their sins, and that they may be remarkable for God's vengeance on them here in this world,² God may give them power over His people, and bring His people into still greater straits. And then the last reason is,

Reason 6. *Because the work of Jesus Christ will be more apparent at the end, the greater the strait is.* And therefore, in Dan 9.25, *He will build up the City even in troublesome times*. Anyone can build in quiet times; but in troubled times, *Christ will build up the City*. And *He rules in the midst of His enemies* (Psa 110.2). Christ loves to rule in the midst of His enemies, so that his rule may be more conspicuous.

Use. Is it so with us? Take heed then, that we don't have our hearts sink because of straits. Let us not say, Why is it this way with us? If God is in a way of mercy, why does He deal thus with us? And shortly we are ready to conclude against the ways of God. "Certainly (we say to ourselves) all is gone, God is gone. Surely whatever the hopes and confidences of such and such were, we see all this is undone; all their hopes are undone." God forbid there should be such an unbelieving heart in any of you, or such murmuring and repining³ speech among any of you, whatever strait you are brought into!

DOCTRINE 2. *In these straits, God's people are mightily troubled.* It was so here in Exodus, in every strait they repined, and were disquieted, and especially at this time. *Stand still* (says Moses). What do you mean to do? There were all in a confusion. And as it was here, so it is many times in many of God's saints — as with the blessed man Heman, who wrote Psalm 88. You'll find in that psalm that he was disquieted. And yet, Heman was one of the wisest men on earth. For so you find him described in 1Kng 4.31, where the Holy Ghost speaks of wise men. Solomon exceeded the wisdom of all of Egypt, for the text there says, *He was wiser than all men*, wiser than Heman. And yet Heman was in woeful perplexity when he was brought into straits. And in Isa 8.11-12, it was

¹ **Gen 15:16** But in the fourth generation they will come back here: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. **Joe 3:13** Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; For the winepress is full, The vats overflow-- For their wickedness is great. **1Th 2:16** forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up *the measure of their sins*; but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

² As with Sodom and Gomorrah, the angels came to see if the sin was as bad as the outcries against it (Gen 18.19-20). When it was confirmed, and had reached its peak, God rained down fire from heaven on them in His wrath (19.24).

³ *Repine*: to express discontent; to "whine and moan."

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the same case *there* that seems to be our case *now*. Oh, there was a conspiracy, a conspiracy, and many people joined together against God's servants, and upon that (the text says), *The Lord spoke to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of His people, saying to me, "Don't say A conspiracy to all those to whom this people say A Conspiracy; nor fear what they fear."* Mark this, that God was pleased to speak to the Prophet with a strong hand, that he should not be so troubled as other people were in the time of their fear.

Yes, many of God's saints whom He has delivered in a most glorious way in the past, will find at other times, when they have been too secure, that their hearts have been all in a confusion, and were not able to stand before the difficulties they met with.

And for that, you have a famous example of Elijah, in 1Kings 19. If you read 1Kng 18.15, you'll see what a spirit Elijah had; he said he would appear before Ahab: *As the Lord of Hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today* (i.e., to Ahab). And he did show himself to Ahab, and tells him it was him and his people who troubled Israel, when Ahab asked him, *Are you the one who troubles Israel? No, Elijah says, It is you, and your father's house that troubled Israel* (1Kng 18.17-18).

And then Elijah comes and gets the priests of Baal together, and gets fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice; and he destroys all the priests of Baal; and he gets rain from heaven to rain upon the earth. What an excellent spirit Elijah had in the 18th chapter. And yet, in the 19th chapter, Jezebel merely threatens Elijah, and he takes to his heels, and runs away at her threat — even though he had such a brave spirit in the previous chapter.

So it is, truly, with many men, that sometimes their courage makes their adversaries afraid, and at other times, their cowardice makes their friends ashamed. Many have been so; they have been a terror to their adversaries one day, and a shame to their friends another day. The reason is:

Reason 1. *Because we have still a great deal of flesh in the best of us, and we are greatly led by our senses;* and because we are not thoroughly skillful in the ways of God, because the fear of God is so weak in us. Therefore it is that the fear of man is so strong, and we know so little of God's secrets. The secrets of God are with those who fear Him. If we feared God more, we would know His secret ways, and not be troubled so much.

Reason 2. *Because there is a great deal of guilt that rests in the best,* and that will make anyone afraid; where there is great guiltiness in their hearts, it is exceedingly troublesome to the soul.

Reason 3. *Because they are too confident in the flesh, they are far too confident in themselves.* This is why God withdraws Himself from them; and whenever they are afraid, they cannot trust God, as David professes (it is an admirable, sweet text) that *whenever he was afraid, he would trust in God*. Many a man for the present thinks he can trust in God; but he cannot do it at that time when he is afraid. Psa 56.3, *Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in the Lord*. When your passion comes, then you make no use of your faith to trust in God. As now, many a man or woman can be meek and quiet, till they have a temptation. But when your passion is up, can you be meek then, and rise then, and beat it down with the contrary grace? So when the passion of your fears and troubles comes up, can you *then* trust in God? "Yes; that is, somewhat..." But because we trust so much in ourselves, when the time comes that we *should* trust in Him, God withdraws Himself from us, and we are most afraid.

Use 1. This use is that we should lay our hands upon our hearts, and charge our souls for this, and be ashamed of it before the Lord. There is no one here who doesn't have cause to lay his hand upon his heart and say, "Oh that I [should be troubled this way], who have had so much experience of God, of His ways of helping and delivering me out of six and seven troubles. And yet the Lord

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knows, upon any new trouble, I am to seek Him *then* as much as ever — in any hurly burly, ¹ in as great a distemper or fear as ever. Be ashamed of this before the Lord. It is true, God's people may be so, and you are so; and therefore, be ashamed of it, and labor to prepare for such times. Those who are troubled with fainting fits, used to carry their bottle of *Aqua vitae* ² about with them. So you who have been disquieted in times of trouble, lay up something that may help in those times. Though a candle's light will serve to carry in a yard in calm weather, it must be a torch, a great light, that must serve when the wind blows. So a little may serve now; but a great deal must be laid up for times of extremity. (1) lay up encouraging *promises*; (2) lay up encouraging *experiences*, that may help you against such times of fainting and trouble.

Use 2. But then, if it is this way with the saints and God's own people — that when they are in straits, they are so ready to be troubled with distracting fears and cares — what then will become of the wicked and ungodly? When they come into straits, how their hearts must sink in horror! Because all their straits are no other than the beginning of eternal straits, present sorrows making a way to eternal sorrows, the way of their deliverance from present straits is by being brought into greater straits. Many women with child have strong pains in their childbirth. Yet when they think they will be delivered, they have joy instead of sorrow.

But a woman that is with child, and is only reprieved from being hanged *because* she is with child, and only *until* she is delivered — even though she has a great deal of trouble and pain before she is delivered, she doesn't desire to be rid of it — because then she knows she will come to greater trouble, and be hanged. If she could live seven years with child, and never be delivered, she could be content with that trouble, because when that is gone, greater trouble comes. So too, wicked and ungodly men who are in great straits for the present, may well be content with them, because when they are gone, greater will come.

DOCTRINE 3. *In the time of these straits, it is our duty to stand still and look for God's salvation, to quiet our spirits, and to look up to God.*

First, *For the quieting of our spirits.*

As the Israelites were to be delivered out of this Egyptian bondage in that way, so they were to be delivered out of the Babylonian bondage in the same way. See what God says for that deliverance. He tells them plainly in Isa 30.15, *In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; but you would not.* In quietness and confidence. It's true, they were in a passionate way, and God tells them that in quietness and in confidence is their strength; but they would not. So, when you come to many people who are in great extremities, to some women and others — when they're wringing their hands, and hanging about their husbands necks — tell them their confidence must be in quietness, and they'll be ready to throw you off a cliff. But they would not (says God). So too, we read in Isa 30.7, *I cried out concerning this, Their strength is to sit still.* ³

My brethren, this day in the Name of God, I cry out concerning all our straits, after we have used all the means we can, we are to *sit still*, and look up to God for salvation. It was their great fault, that they did not do so in their deliverance out of their captivity. There is one remarkable place for that in Jer 31.22, *How long will you go about?* ⁴ *Oh, you backsliding daughter! For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth.* How long will you go about, Oh you backsliding daughter? What's the meaning of this text? It means this: in the time of their deliverance from Captivity, they met with a great deal of difficulty, many straits, and they went about to this and that sharking

¹ *Hurly burly*: a tizzy or frenzy; disorderly outburst or tumult; a violent agitation.

² *Aqua vitae*: a stimulant like smelling salts; a concentrated solution of ethanol; also brandy or "spirits of wine."

³ In the KJV it reads, *Rahab-Hem-Shebeth*, translated "Rahab who sits still."

⁴ Various translations, gad about, waver, wander, vacillate, go here and there, etc. The Hebrew *chamaq*, is to withdraw, turn around, or turn away — as if to turn back to Babylon, as the first Israelites wanted to return to Egypt, and we to sin.

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course; they backslid. And even when they were in a good way, they went back again. And the Prophet couldn't get them to stand still in *any* way. It's as if he should have said, "Go on right in the way; don't be discouraged by difficulties or extremities. Don't seek any shifting way; don't backslide — but stand to your tackling and work that God has set you about. For the Lord has created a new thing."

Perhaps you'll say, "There was never a strait like the one we're in." Well, God has such *mercy* as He never showed the likes of before. God has created a *new* thing. Many cry out in their straits, "O my affliction, and my strait is such as was never in the world!" Well, gratify them so (as many times we must gratify distempered spirits when they cry out about the greatness of their straits). Yet, is there no comfort for them, to stay them? Yes! Isa 64.4. *It was never known since the beginning of the world, what God has laid up for those who wait for Him.* Only wait for Him, and there was never such mercy shown in the world, as God has laid up for you. So that, come, let us grant it: that there was never the like of that affliction that you are under. Yet there is reason enough for you to wait, and to look for the salvation of God in such a way, and in such a condition.

I will give some reasons for that part of the Doctrine that we are to stand still and be quiet. For by standing still, and quieting our hearts in our straits:

Reason 1. *We are fit to look to the wisdom, faithfulness, and power of God.* We are not able to see God's wisdom, faithfulness, and power, nor to make use of it, *unless we get our spirits to be quiet.* First, get the quiet, and then we can look up to God. Psa 46.10, *Be still (says the text) and know that I am God.* There is a God in heaven who can help and succor us in time of great straits and extremities. But for all this, people are in a hurly burly; their spirits are distempered, and they're wringing their hands, and crying. They cannot know that God is God, they can have no use of all the power, and goodness, and faithfulness, and mercy of God. *First* get your hearts still and quiet in your families, and in your own spirits, and *then* you'll know that God is God. God will not appear till first, you're still.

Reason 2. *We are not able to make use of our own graces, till we are quiet and still.* If God had bestowed graces when we are in a hurly burly, we have no use for them at all. Therefore it says in Psa 4.4, *Stand in awe; do not sin; commune with your own hearts upon your beds, and be still.* Commune with your own hearts: you have something in your own hearts, perhaps, that may quiet you. Commune with your own hearts and be still. You are fit to commune with your own hearts, till you get them quiet. First be quiet, and then commune. (Oh! my brethren) A man or woman of a staid, sound, quiet, and still spirit, has a mighty advantage over all passionate spirits. There are many of you who are passionate at all other times; and that is the reason that in such great extremities, you are so overruled with passion. You are so overruled with your passion of anger at other times, and out of God's judgment, that you are overruled with the passion of fear now. But if at other times you would labor to rein in your spirits, God would help you now.

Reason 3. Because without this stillness, and quietness, we cannot manifest that subjection to God that we owe Him. For then there is a great deal of sin, and pride, and haughtiness committed against God. And therefore in that fourth Psalm, the old Latin has it, *My soul be silent; my soul is subject to God.* And the subjection of our souls to God, depends much upon this quieting of our hearts.

Reason 4. Our reverence of God depends much upon it; and therefore in this fourth Psalm, *Stand in awe, and don't sin; commune with your own heart, and be still.* For us to behave ourselves in such a manner as many people do, wringing and throwing up their hands, and keeping such a stir as they do — this shows there is not in their hearts, that reverence they owe to God; *stand in awe.* If your hearts were possessed with the fear of God, you wouldn't keep such a stir as you do in times of great danger.

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Reason 5. This makes people unfit to listen to anything that is spoken to them. Let anything be spoken to them that is of use, and they cannot hear it or make use of it. As we read about the people of Israel, Exo 6.9, when Moses came to tell them of their deliverance, the text says, *He spoke to the children of Israel, but they didn't hearken to him — why? — for anguish of spirit.* How many in trouble of conscience, and in other times of extremity, have their spirits in such anguish that they never hearken to anything that is delivered to them; and therefore they come with the same objection over and over again, a hundred times in cases of conscience.

Reason 6. Without this quietness of spirit, you are mighty hinderers of others, and you daunt and discourage the hearts of others. And many times, the cause miscarries merely upon the unquietness of the hearts of men and women in time of danger. Therefore, you must be quiet, and look up to God for salvation. For faith has this excellence, that it is able to bring life out of death, light out of darkness. It has a kind of creating virtue. As God himself brings one contrary out of another, so faith has such a kind of working. If faith is of the right stamp, a genuine faith, it has a mighty power in times of extremity, to behold God's salvation, and make use of it.

I'll give you one example of the use of faith in times of extremity, and that is of David, when he fled from Saul, and was in the cave. Mark what he says, Psa 57.1, *Be merciful to me, O God; be merciful to me, for my soul trusts in You. Yes, in the shadow of your wings I will make my refuge.* What was the shadow of God's wings? Poor David had gotten into the shadow of the cave, and the sun didn't shine upon him; but he looked at himself in the cave, as being under the shadow of God's wings. You poor people who live, it may be in cellars, and in poor dark holes and lanes; the sun scarcely shines on you in a year. And yet, if you are godly, you are under God's wings by faith.

I will now speak to the second part of the Doctrine, that *we are to expect salvation from God.*

David fled from Absalom, and yet what confidence did David have (in that case) in God? Read but that third Psalm,¹ and you'll see confidence enough in David, and yet fleeing too. I will give various grounds and reasons for this, for why we must *look up to God*, as well as *be still*.

Reason 1. By this we sanctify God's names: *don't fear what they fear* (Isa 8.12), but *sanctify God in your hearts*, says the text, 1Pet 3.15; or else you don't sanctify God. I suppose many of you would be loath to be guilty of swearing, and taking God's name in vain in that way. But by your disquieting thoughts, and unseemly carriage in times of danger, you take God's name in vain; you break the Third Commandment.

Reason 2. This shows the beauty and excellence of faith. As David said, *You shall see what your servant can do* (1Sam 28.2). So now, there is a great deal of talk of faith in the world; let us see now what it can do. The truth of love is when I can *love* God for Himself without His gifts; so too when I can *believe* God without experience.² I show the excellence of my faith when I can *trust* God merely upon His word — as I love God merely for Himself, when my faith takes God's single bond, without any security.³ *That* is the excellence of faith. When I must have outward helps and assurances, I call for sureties. So Christians, when they must have outward helps, and former experiences, they call to God for sureties, as if they wouldn't trust God upon His single bond. *That* is the excellence of faith, to trust God upon His single bond.

Reason 3. When we look up to God for salvation, we engage God in our cause. God doesn't own the cause till then, and then He owns it. Now, how happy we would be if we could thus, in all our

¹ **Psa 3:3-6** But You, O LORD, *are* a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head. ⁴ I cried to the LORD with my voice, And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah ⁵ I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me. ⁶ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set *themselves* against me all around.

² **Joh 20:29** Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed *are* those who have not seen and *yet* have believed."

³ Loaning money on a promise (a bond), based on trust alone, without demanding collateral to secure its repayment.

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particular and private straits, *stand still and look up to God for help and for salvation*. It is true, you cry out and complain — I have lost a dear husband, and a dear friend; never has man lost such a friend, and I have been brought into these great straits. But don't lose the quiet of your heart too; take heed of that. That is a greater loss than any loss you can have in this world. I remember I read of a philosopher who had this expression, saying, "If the gods would grant me my desire, and bid me to ask what I would have, I would ask them for this — that I might have the composed spirit of Socrates, that I might have such a spirit as Socrates had. For it is observed about him, that he scarcely changed his countenance upon anything that befell him; he was always in a quiet composed frame." And yet Socrates was a heathen. How much more should a Christian say, "If God would give me my asking, I would ask for nothing but that." For indeed, there is a great deal of glory and excellence in a composed spirit. *This is worthy of the Gospel*. Therefore mark what the Apostle says in Phi 1.27, *Only let your conversation be as it becomes the Gospel of Christ, that whether I come to see you, or am absent from you, I may hear of your affairs, and that you stand in one spirit*. This is to walk worthy of the Gospel: to stand fast in one spirit.

And observe this: that unless we stand fast, and quiet our hearts, we lose everything that would help us. When we are in a hurly burly in our spirits to get some help, alas, we lose all our help. Therefore, in Phi 4.7, *Let the peace of God keep your hearts*, the original word there is *guard your hearts*. The peace of God in your hearts must be the best guard of your hearts in time of danger. Now, because you would avoid trouble, you put away your guard. What madness is this? Casting away the peace of God, is casting away your guard. Therefore, keep that in your hearts, whatever else you may lose. Yes, it is our Armor. Mark Ephesians 6. What is the Armor of a Christian?

First, *the girdle (belt) of truth*; but fear dissolves the heart, and makes a man so that he cannot gird himself. When he is in fear, his heart is melted, and he has little use of his truth — then the girdle is loosed. In the text, there is *the helmet of salvation*; but in fear, hope is gone. There is the breastplate of righteousness; but in fear, a man has no use for his righteous conduct, nor any use of the sword of the Spirit. He can use nothing in times of such disquieting fears. Therefore, don't lose your Armor. It is very observable in Ephesians 6 how the Holy Ghost still calls upon us to stand. Verse 10, *My brethren, be strong in the Lord*, and not only strong, but *strong in the Lord*; and strong in the might of the Lord, *and in the power of His might; put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand*. Then again, in verse 13, *Therefore take on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand the evil one; and having done all, to stand*.

Even if perhaps you have overcome at one time, *still* look to your own hearts. When you have done all, *stand*. Four times we're called up to stand, noting what a great advantage we have by standing. It is true, our afflictions are great, and the soul says, *The Lord is my portion* (Lam 3.24); and it is good for a man to say, What, will I who am so full of sin, not be willing to have some trouble, but instead, be so full of fears upon every trouble that befalls me? Why should I not yield to God's providential will, as well as to His commanding will? How do I know if God doesn't have glorious ends to work out of these extremities and troubles that I'm in? Why shouldn't I give myself up to God, to have His will upon me? And hasn't God previously delivered me from great straits and extremities, even from the wrath of God Himself, and from His Justice? These are greater and other manners of straits than I am now in.

And if I don't believe in God now, but am disquieted, perhaps these straits may be to bring me to greater straits. What if these straits of affliction *were* to bring me to greater straits? And isn't it just for God to leave me to fall into the straits of sin, who cannot bear the straits of affliction? Therefore, let me *stand still*, and look up to God's salvation. Let us be so affected with our straits, as to carry us up to God in prayer. Pray as much as you can, but still keep your hearts in a quiet frame. And if your prayers are right, they will be to you, as Luther said, the leeches of your cares. When you're distempered, go to prayer; and then examine what a great deal of corrupt blood those

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prayers have sucked out of your heart. As with Hannah, when she had been at prayer, she no longer looked sad (1Sam 1.18).

There are many things I thought to have given you, to stay your hearts in time of extremities. *Peace shall be to that man whose heart is stayed on God; and blessed is that man who stays his heart on God.* And if ever people had cause to stay their hearts upon God, certainly we have at this day, for we have God with us. Therefore it is unworthy of a Christian to have a distempered spirit. I remember I have read of the Romans, that when Hannibal was just before them, they still bought and sold their ground as they did at other times — they were so quiet in their hearts. It was a speech that Antigonor¹ gave when some were afraid of the multitude that came against him (they say). “So many are coming against us.” He says, “How many do you reckon *me* for?” So may we say, “We hear of so many thousands coming against us; but how many do you reckon Jesus Christ for?” How many do you reckon him for, who is the Captain of all our Hosts? (Jos 5.14) Haven't prayers been sent up to God? Why do you despise the prayers of the saints of God, as if there were nothing in their prayers? Isn't God's name engaged in all this business?

Oh therefore *stand still*, and don't be afraid. And especially let me speak a word to you who are of timorous and fearful spirits. Isa 35.4, *Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Fear not.* Don't excuse yourselves in this, that you are of a timorous nature (says God). *Say to those who are of a fearful heart, Fear not.* And especially mark what the Holy Ghost speaks to women in 1Pet 3.4: *Women must clothe themselves with a meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price in the sight of God.* And in the 6th verse, *As Sarah obeyed Abraham, and called him Lord, whose daughters you are as long as you do good, and are not afraid of any terror.*

What should the meaning of that be, that women must be the daughters of Sarah on these terms? It means that Abraham was brought into straits many times, and carried from his own country. Now Sarah, if she had been such a spirit as many women are, Oh how Sarah would have hindered her husband Abraham, in every strait he was brought into. She would have said, “Husband, why do we go from our own country, and our friends, and so we are brought into such straits? I pray you husband, go back again, and don't risk yourself thus and thus.” But it seems she was of a gracious spirit, and quieted herself in God, and was not afraid with terror. If you would approve yourselves the daughters of Sarah, do so when God calls your husbands to any service, even if it is with some hazard. Don't hang about their necks and wring your hands, and say, “I beseech you husband, consider what will become of me and my children! Will you leave me now?” Take heed, you are *not* the daughters of Sarah if you hinder your husbands at such a time as this.

DOCTRINE 4. *That the sight of salvation after straits, will be a glorious thing.* If we are brought into straits, that which is coming will pay for all; there is enough to satisfy. Let us not be troubled at greater straits than we yet have. Suppose blood should be shed (beloved). God has such mercy for England, that shall pay for all the blood of his saints, that shall be shed; and the blood of His people is a precious thing. Every drop of the blood of His people is very precious, and the Adversary shall be accountable for every drop. God will value it, and there shall be a valuable consideration given for every drop of blood. And the more difficulties we have in obtaining that mercy God is about to give us, the mercy shall be the greater. Isa 54.11, *O you afflicted one and tossed with tempests, your foundations will be laid with sapphires, and with precious stones.* If we are afflicted and tossed with tempests, and the blood of God's people goes with it, then comfort yourselves with this: the more precious blood that is shed in this business, the greater mercy is to come. For God will have a valuable consideration for all the blood of His saints.

FINIS

¹ Antigonor or Antigonus, one of Alexander's generals (c. 336 B.C.), later the possessor of Asia. Josephus mentions Herod fighting against Antigonus (Mattathias), the last Hasmonean king (37 B.C.).