

# The Art of Contentment

BY RICHARD SIBBES

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‘The Art of Contentment’ forms the last of the sermons of the ‘Saint’s Cordials,’ published in 1637 and 1658. It had previously been No. 1 of the first edition, 1629. The text of 1637 is followed in our reprint. In Vol. IV, pp 75-111 will be found a specimen of the *various readings* of the editions of 1637 and 1658 on a comparison with that of 1629. These may suffice. The result of a minute collation shows that the edition of 1637 presents a careful revision and enlargement of the anonymous, and I suspect, surreptitious edition of 1629... *The edition of 1637, let it be understood, represents Sibbes’s own version of his sermons, either from fuller ‘Notes,’ or from a revision of that of 1629.* — G.

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*I have learned, in whatever estate I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and how to abound: everywhere, in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. — Phi 4.11-13.*

THE words are the blessed apostle’s concerning himself, expressing the glorious power of the Spirit of God in a strong and grown Christian, and are to wipe away the imputation of worldliness in the apostle. They also serve for a pattern to all God’s children, that they may learn by his example — that as they must be careful to avoid all blemishes and imputations, so especially that of *worldliness*, as being most contrary to the profession of a Christian, who has a ‘high calling’ and whose ‘hope is in heaven,’ Phi 3.14.

The Philippians had sent Paul some relief; and lest they think he expected great material support, he tells them that he had ‘learned to be content in whatever estate he was.’

It is not amiss sometimes for God’s children to speak of themselves, as Paul did here, as to other good ends; and so also to avoid false imputations in the way of a just defense; and likewise to be exemplary to weaker Christians. Isn’t the doctrine of contentment <sup>1</sup> and the power of grace in all estates, better learned by this blessed example of Paul when he says of himself, ‘I have learned, in whatever estate I am, to be content: to want, and to abound,’ etc. — than if he had weakly said, Be content with your present condition? The Scriptures are intended for *practice*; and this is why there are so many examples in them, to show the power of God’s Spirit. This is the end of Paul’s speaking so of himself, ‘I have learned,’ etc.

## **To come to the words:**

First, he sets down in general *the power of God’s Spirit in him* regarding that blessed grace of *contentment*. ‘I have learned, in whatever estate I am, to be content with it.’

And then he *parcels out this general condition, into particulars in this same state*, ‘I know how to be abased, and how to abound.’

And then he *wraps it all up in general again*, ‘I can do all things,’ etc.

But lest this seem to be somewhat vain, ‘I can do all things,’ as if he were omnipotent (in some sense, indeed, a Christian *is* omnipotent), he therefore adds a blessed correction, ‘*through Christ* who strengthens me.’

‘I have learned,’ he says; ‘I am instructed.’ This phrase is very significant in the original, namely, I am consecrated to this knowledge of contentment in all estates. <sup>2</sup> It is not learning from great

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<sup>1</sup> Contentment here isn’t merely enjoying creature comforts, but being satisfied that we are true Christians. — WHG

<sup>2</sup> The original is ἐμαθον (*emathon*), I have been *fully taught*, I have been *initiated*. The Vulgate is closer than our version, *institutus sum*. — G

persons, or from learned persons, but from *holy* persons. It is a mystical knowledge. There is a mystery in it. For as all religion is a mystery — ‘great is the mystery of godliness’<sup>1Tim 3.16</sup> — not only is the *speculative* part a mystery, but likewise the *practical* part of it; so *every part* of religion is a mystery. Repentance is a mystery; faith is a mystery; and this practical part of contentment in all conditions, is a great mystery. And therefore St Paul says he is *instructed* in it, as a consecrated person, having the Spirit of God in him. All the degrees in this world cannot teach this lesson that Paul had learned, ‘to be contented.’ He didn’t learn it in any school of the world, nor at the feet of Gamaliel; he learned it from Christ, and by blessed experiences in afflictions.

Some graces are reserved for some estates. Paul had learned patience and contentment in variety of estates. He did not have it by *nature*; for he says, ‘I have *learned*.’ It is a mystical thing, not so easily attained as the world is foolishly persuaded. Your ordinary Christian thinks that religion is nothing, that it is easily learned; whereas there is no point in religion that is *not* a mystery. There is no Christian who doesn’t find it so when he sets himself heartily to go through any religious work — such as to humble himself, to repent, to go out of himself, and to cast himself on the mercy of God in Christ. Oh, *then* he will say it’s a mystery. ‘There is a difficulty in this work that I never thought of till I came to it.’ And so, to be content with our condition, whatever the case may be, to bring our hearts low, this is a mystery. Nature never teaches this. It is learned in the school of Christ, and not without many stripes. We must be proficient a good while, before we can learn to any purpose this one lesson of *contentment in any condition*.

But the last verse is what I will now dwell on, in which we may observe three things.

1. First, *God carries his children in this world through a variety of conditions*. They sometimes want, and sometimes abound. Their condition is sometimes more comfortable than at others. That is the first point.
  2. The second is, *in this variety of conditions, just as they know what it is to want and to abound in all variety of conditions, so they know how to carry themselves*.
  3. Thirdly, *they know in all variety of conditions how to avoid the sins incident to that condition*. As there are graces belonging to every state, so there are sins incident to every condition. And the child of God has learned to practice the one, and to avoid the other.
1. First, *God’s children know what it is to want, and to abound by experience*. God leads them through a variety of conditions. Their estate is not always one and the same.

*Quest.* What is the reason for this dispensation in God to thus rule his children, to bring them to heaven by a variety of conditions?

*Sol.*<sup>3</sup> Among many other reasons, this is one: *that their graces may be tried*. Every grace that brings a Christian to heaven must be a *tried* grace. He must try his patience, his contentment, his humility. How would these graces be tried but in a variety of estates and conditions? And secondly, how would we experience the goodness of God but in a variety of estates? When we find the stable, certain, constant love of God in a variety of conditions — that however our conditions ebb and flow, be up and down like the spring weather, sometimes fair and sometimes foul — yet notwithstanding, the love of God is always constant. And we never have so sure an experience of it, as in the variety of conditions that befall us. *Then* we know that in God there is ‘no shadow of changing,’<sup>Jas 1.17</sup> however the changes of our life may be. Isn’t it a point worth our learning, to know the truth of our grace, and to know the constancy of God’s love, with whom we are in a gracious covenant? And then again, we learn much wisdom in how to manage our life by this, even in the intercourse of our changes — to now be rich, now poor, now high, now low in estate. Wisdom is gotten by experience in a variety of estates. Someone who is carried on in but one condition, has

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<sup>3</sup> *Sol.* – *soliloquy*; a thought or meditation revealed to the reader. – WHG

no wisdom to judge another's estate, or to carry himself toward a Christian in another condition, because he was never abased himself. He looks very largely at him. Someone who hasn't been in another's condition, doesn't know how to be tender towards him. And therefore, to furnish us — so that we may carry ourselves as Christians, meekly, lovingly, and tenderly to others — God would have us go to heaven in variety, not in one uniform condition regarding outward things.

**Use.** Learn from this *not to quarrel with God's government*; for though He alters our conditions, He never alters his love. A Christian is unmovable regarding the favor of God toward him, and regarding sanctifying grace. In all moveable conditions he has a fixed condition. Therefore, let us not find fault with God's dispensation, but let Him do as he pleases. He brings us to heaven; it is no matter what way, or how rugged it is, so long as He brings us there.

**2.** The second general thing is this: *That in this variety of conditions, God's children know how to carry themselves.* As they know what it is to want and to abound, so they know how to abound and be abased *as they should do.* For there is no condition that a Christian may not pick good material out of it. As a good artisan, to show his skill, sometimes makes a good piece of work from a bad piece of material, so a Christian can frame good material out of any condition. He knows how to want, and how to abound, and to do that with the expression of graces too. He can practice the graces that should and may be practiced in all conditions. For instance, he can abound; that is, by expressing the graces that *should be* in abundance, and which he *has* in abundance, which is thankfulness to God, a *spirit* of thankfulness. He has a spirit to be a faithful steward in his abundance; and a spirit to honor God with his abundance. He has a spirit to be humble in abundance, knowing all is like the 'grass and the flower of the field.' <sup>Psa 103:5</sup> He can be humble; he can stoop under the mighty hand of God; he can experience the abasement of the vanity of worldly favor, and worldly greatness. He learns what it is, and so he can learn patience, and all other graces that are to be practiced in a lowly estate. It would take too long to name particulars; a Christian can do this. Grace is above all conditions. It can manage and rule all estates of life. It makes them serviceable to its own ends. A gracious man is not overly dejected with abasement; he is not overly lifted up with abundance; but he carries himself in a uniform manner, as becomes a Christian in all conditions.

**3.** The third general thing is, *He can want and he can abound, without overly tainting himself with the sins of those conditions.* For instance, he can abound without *pride*, though it is a hard thing to do. Abundance works upon the soul of a man. He needs to have a strong brain that digests abundance; it is a wild untamed thing. And we see by experience in God's children how hard a matter it is for them to manage abundance. We see how it worked on Solomon and David; they were better in adversity, 1Kng 11.1, 2Sam 11.2. And yet notwithstanding, the child of God has grace even to overcome the sins that are incident to abundance. He has grace to be lowly-minded in a great estate; not to trust to uncertain riches. He knows by the Spirit of God what they are, and that he has an inheritance of better things in another world — which teaches him to set a light esteem on all things below.

And so too for *dejection*. The sin that we are subject to fall into in our want, is putting our hands out to evil means, to connive.<sup>4</sup> God's child can learn to want without tainting his conscience with bad courses; and then he can want without impatience, and without too much dejection of spirit as if all were lost. Whereas, indeed, a Christian in a way is rich in all these alike. For God is his portion; though a sunbeam may be taken away, the *sun* is his; take away a stream, the *spring* is his; in the poorest estate, God All-sufficient is his still. And so, in a way, a Christian is rich in all these alike. God never takes *Himself* away, Gen 17.1. A Christian knows this, and therefore he can want, he can be abased, as long as he has the Spring of all. Though a cistern is taken away, he doesn't care; he can want and abound without murmuring, without dejection of spirit. Whereas

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<sup>4</sup> Originally, *to shift*. – WHG

those who have not been brought up in Christ's school, nor trained up in variety of conditions, are able to do nothing. If they abound, they are proud; if they are cast down, they murmur and fret, and are dejected, acting as if there were no Providence to rule the world, as if they were fatherless children. This is the excellency of a Christian: that as he knows by experience what it means to abound, so he knows how to abound with the practice of the graces, and how to want while avoiding the snares usually found in that condition.

**Obj.** But has a Christian learned this at the first?

**Ans.** No: he doesn't learn it very easily, nor very soon. *Self-denial is the first lesson in Christ's school:* to have no wit of our own further than Christ's wisdom; to have no will of our own further than his commandment guides us. And whoever has learned self-denial, is in a great way to learn this blessed lesson of contentment in any condition whatsoever. So that every Christian has some degree of it, as he learns to deny himself. But there are many things to be learned before we can come to carry ourselves wisely in any condition.

For besides self-denial, we must learn *the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace:* that God in Christ has become a Father to us, and carries a fatherly mind toward us. In whatever condition we are in, He is a father still, and intends us well, and will provide for us in the hardest condition. Having taken the relation of a father upon himself, do you think he will fail in the carriage of a father towards us? He is pitiful to us; he respects us in the basest condition. Whoever knows God to be his father, cast him into whatever condition you will, he knows he has a good portion.

And then we must know *the doctrine of the providence of this Father,* that all will work together for the best to those who love him, Rom 8.28 — want and abundance, prosperity and afflictions, *whatever.* God by his overruling power will bring all things to this blessed issue: to help forward the eternal good of his child. A man must know this, and various things like that are to be known before he can learn this blessed lesson of contentment. There is a venom and a vanity with which we are tainted, in everything without grace. But when grace comes, it takes the sting out of all that is ill; and then we find a good in the worst. There is a vanity in the best things, and there is a good in the worst. Grace picks the good out of the worst. As God turns all to good, so grace finds good in every condition. The Spirit of God sanctifies a Christian to all conditions, and He sanctifies every condition to a Christian.

Now, I beseech you, think of what I have said, which I wish without further enlargement may add to your care; and *desire* to be in the happy condition of Christians. What a blessed thing it is to be in the Covenant of Grace, to have God be our father, and to be in Christ. So that, let our outward condition be what it will, we will have grace to carry ourselves in it; God will go along with us by his Holy Spirit! What a blessed thing it is, in all the uncertainties of the world, to have a certain rule to go by, as a Christian has, which carries him along in all the uncertainties in this world! None but a Christian has this. *'I have learned,'* says Paul. When did he learn it? Not before he was a Christian. This I could desire to press, but I have other things to speak of, to make us in love with religion, with the state of Christians, which is thus above all conditions whatsoever, and can rule all other conditions.

A Christian is not at the mercy of the world; his contentment is not a *dependent* contentment. You may cast him into prison; you may impoverish him; you may labor to debase and disgrace him; but can you take away his comfort? Can you take away his grace? Can you take away the love of God? No! God will rather increase all upon him. For the best things of a Christian are not at the mercy of the world, nor at the mercy of his several conditions. Prosperity and adversity, these are *outside* of him. He has a state depending upon the good will and pleasure of his Father, who loves him better than he loves himself, and out of love He will work good out of the worst condition that can befall him.

So I hasten to what follows.

4. Having spoken to three things in *particular*, he then comes to the *general*, in which he wraps it all up: 'I can do all things, only in Christ who strengthens me.' Here is,

First of all, *the blessed apostle's ability*, 'I can do all things.'

And then here is, secondly, the *spring* of his ability, where he gets it from: 'I can do all things, *only in Christ who strengthens me.*'

In the apostle's ability you have,

(1) *His strength itself.*

(2) *The enlargement of it.*

'I am able.' Able to do what? A few things? No, '*all things.*' The point of the doctrine offered is this: that *a Christian man is an able man*. Whoever has the Spirit of Christ is an able man, and his ability is a large ability; he is able to do *all things*. Take "doing" in a transcendent sense, not only to do, but take it to resist ill, to resist temptation, to suffer affliction, to enjoy prosperity, to break off sinful courses, and to take a new course, to practice all duties. For so the apostle means 'I can do' — that is, I can carry myself in all conditions; I can express all graces; I can resist all temptations; I can suffer all afflictions. *I can do all this.*

What is the reason a Christian is so able?

1. Because, first of all, *he has a stronger and abler spirit than his own*. The Spirit of God is a spirit of strength, 2Tim 1.8. It is the Spirit of power, which is the soul of his soul, and the life of his life. Now, the strength of a man is in his spirit. The stronger spirit makes the abler man, and the Spirit of God being the strongest of spirits, indeed the strength of spirits, it makes a Christian in whom it dwells, the ablest man.

2. And then again, *a Christian is a new creature*. Therefore, he is furnished with abilities fit for the new creature. When Adam was created, he was endued with all graces fit for an entire estate. As when God made heaven, he made stars to beautify heaven; and when He made the earth, he made trees and flowers. So too, when He made man, he furnished him with graces, and fitted him for that estate. Now, after the fall, when God brings a man in Christ to be *a new creature*, he has abilities to furnish him for that new condition.

3. And then again, *every particular grace of the new creature is a grace of STRENGTH*. As the Spirit is a strong Spirit, so the SPIRIT OF LOVE is as strong as death; it has a 'constraining power,' 2Cor 5.14. The Spirit of God is so strong in his children who are truly his, that it makes them with a willingness even to lay down their life, which is dearest to them in this world. Here is a sweet kind of tyranny in the affection of love, that will carry a man through thick and thin, through all, and do it with pleasure, willingly and comfortably too — as the apostles were glad to suffer anything for Christ's sake, their hearts were so enlarged with a spirit of love.

The SPIRIT OF FAITH is a strong and mighty spirit, an able spirit. It conquers God himself, as Jacob wrestled with the wrestlings of God; and by the strength of God, it overcame God, Hos 12.3-4. And the woman of Canaan overcame Christ by the strength she had from Christ, Mat 15.28. In the sense of God's *displeasure*, faith will believe God's *favor in Christ*, and is able to break through the thickest clouds of discomfort whatsoever, and to see the loving face of God. In a base condition, it can struggle with God, saying with Job, 'Though he kills me, yet will I trust in him,' Job 13.15. *It is a strong grace*. Faith prevails with almighty God. It prevails in all inferior conditions whatsoever. You see the fruit and strength of all graces is attributed to faith, Heb 11.33. By faith they overcame; by faith they were strong and did this and that — insinuating that faith is not only a strong grace *in itself*, but it gives vigor and strength *to all graces*.

And so we see LOVE in 1Cor 13.4. It is not only a strong grace, but the office of other graces is attributed to it. It suffers long, which is the office of patience. What should I speak of other

graces, these radical and fundamental graces being of such force? Now, every Christian in some measure has a SPIRIT OF FAITH and a SPIRIT OF LOVE, and these are very strong, to carry him through all estates and conditions; and that is with such glory and luster, that everyone may wonder at the condition of a Christian. Even in the worst estate, he has a spirit not *of* the world, but *above* the world. This faith overcomes the world; and He that is in them, the Spirit of God, is stronger than he that is in the world, 1Joh 4.4.

To proceed to a further demonstration of a Christian man's ability, see what is intimated to us in his very name. What is the name of a Christian? '*Anointed.*' The Spirit of God is compared to oil. What is the virtue of oil? It is to *make nimble*, for the Spirit of God makes Christians nimble. And oil also *makes strong*. The wrestlers were usually anointed with oil beforehand; so the Spirit of God makes Christians strong. The virtue of anointing oil is to be *above*. Mix it together with other liquors, and it is a regal liquor; it will have pre-eminence, and float above. So grace, although it is mingled with corruption, the Spirit of grace and faith will at last appear; the Spirit of God will be above all; at length it will work itself clear. In all temptations, a Christian — *as a Christian* — is an able man. If he is answerable to his own name, if he is not a hypocrite, then he has an ability in him; he can do more than the world.

**Use 1.** First of all then, learn here *that religion is not a matter of words, nor does it stand upon words*, as a wood consists of trees. To speak thus and so, it may *come* from parts — from memory and wit — but religion is a matter of **power**; it makes a man **able**. Look what it made of Paul! Is it *only* to speak? No! His learning made him able to do all things. It is a matter of *practice*; and there is nothing so speculative in religion that it does not tend to *practice*. Religion is an art, not of great men, not of mighty men, but of *holy* men. It is an art and a trade. A trade is not learned by words, but by *experience*; and a man has learned a trade, not when he can talk about it, but when he can work according to his trade. So we see that Paul shows his learning, which he speaks of before, by his ability.

The point of the Trinity is a *speculative* point, but it tends to *practice*. First, to be a foundation of our worship, that we worship one God in three persons. And then it tends to show the unity among Christians — that God will work among Christians at length; that they shall be all one in some sort, as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one. Though this is a point of high and deep speculation, yet it tends to practice. Now, if the sublime and high points do this, what point is there in religion if it doesn't tend to *practice*? And therefore, let us not please ourselves that we have deep understandings, but let us show our understandings by our practice. As the sheep shows how he thrives in his pasture by his wool and fleece, show how you profit in religion, by being so enabled with the power of grace that carries you through all conditions, to avoid the sins and to express the graces in such conditions. How much grace you have to carry yourself this way, is how much ability you have, and how much religion.

**Use 2.** If a Christian is an able man, I beseech you, *let it serve to try ourselves by this scantling* <sup>5</sup> *that I have spoken of*. Is Christianity a point of strength and ability? Then let us test the truth of our estate. Would you be a Christian? What can you do then? What sin can you resist? What can you bear? What holy duty can you perform? How can you enjoy the good blessings that God sends you, without defiling yourself with those blessings, so that you are not proud of the riches nor of the honor you have? Grace manages *all* conditions. Thus, if you are a Christian, answer to your name; if not, you are yet a hypocrite. For a Christian in some measure is able 'to do all things, through Christ who strengthens him.' I beseech you, let us not deceive ourselves. The best of us may mourn for our want in this kind. Our conscience tells us that we might have done a great deal more than we have — that if we had not been false-hearted and betrayed ourselves, and been negligent in the use of the means, God would have enabled us to have done a great deal more than

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. note a, Vol I. page 117. — G. *Scantling* — a small amount.

we have done. What a shame it is for Christians who indeed have some truth of grace in them, that they cannot be a little abased in the world without being *à la mort*.<sup>6</sup> Why, where is the *power of grace*? They cannot be lifted up in their own condition a little, without ignoring their brother of low degree. Where is religion *now*? What do you have in you, that is better than a worldling has? Indeed, a heathen, out of mere principles of morality, would learn to conform his carriage better than you do, at least outwardly. Therefore, let us learn to shame ourselves when we find any murmuring and rising of a corrupt nature in any condition whatsoever, and know that this does not become a Christian. This is what the apostle presses so often, that we should carry ourselves as becomes Christians. Oh, does *this* become a Christian? A Christian should be able to do all things through Christ who strengthened him. What a shame it is for a professor of religion to be as worldly, as distracted with cares, as passionate, if he is as little touched as a man who professes no religion at all? Where is the power? Where is the glory and credit of religion here? I beseech you, let us be ashamed, and know that our profession requires that we *should* be able.

**Use 3.** Again, *this answers the common objection of carnal men*. They ward off all reproofs with this: tell them of their faults, and they say it is my own infirmity, my own weakness. Is it so? Are you a Christian or *not*? If you are a Christian, you labor for strength against your weakness; you don't make an excuse for it. There is indeed weakness in the best of us; but that is the matter of their *humiliation*, and the object of their *mortification*. It is not their excuse for idleness, to give themselves to sinful courses. Men therefore make a *false* plea of their infirmities and weaknesses. There is no "infirmity" in a carnal man, who doesn't have the Spirit of Christ. He is *dead*; there is no weakness in a dead person. In regard to *civil* carriages, there may be weakness in such a man. He may be passionate; he may be froward, unbecoming of a man who is *civil*; but that is not in the same rank that we speak of. None can have *infirmities* except a Christian who has the life of grace in him, in sincerity and truth. And therefore, if you discover that you don't have the *truth of grace*, never say it is your infirmity.

To show what infirmities are, I rank them under three heads.

1. In the first rank of infirmities are *imperfections of good actions*. These are either distractions and deadness in prayer and hearing; or else invincible infirmities, of which an ancient father says well, 'Lord, deliver me from my miserable necessities.'<sup>7</sup> A man may sometimes be in such a state regarding the temper of his body, that it being out of tune, he cannot pray as he would. 'The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,' says our Savior, Mat 26.41. It was almost an invincible necessity in the apostles then. Again, we might resist, and be more cheerful than we oftentimes are. But sometimes there may be such a distemper in the body, that it may almost of necessity unfit us for the duty. We call this the *infirmity* of a Christian because he is ashamed of it, and grieved for it.

2. Again, infirmities are *those indeliberate passions that sometimes carry us to actions that we should not do*, being carried with a tempest of passion, when we don't understand ourselves well.

3. And lastly, it is an infirmity *when we are hindered from doing what we should do, upon some passion, upon being surprised by some great fear and terror*, such that we are not so bold as we should be to stand up in a cause — it is suddenly, as when Peter was surprised by a spirit of fear that he would lose his life, Mat 26.70. It was not a predisposition in him; it was an infirmity in the blessed apostle *for that time*.

These, then, are the signs of infirmities: to have invincible imperfections, or distraction and deadness accompanying our good actions; to be carried in the heat and tempest of passion to do

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<sup>6</sup> That is, 'deadened' — dead-afraid [or *scared to death*]. — G.

<sup>7</sup> 'Lord, deliver me from my miserable necessities.' The saying is that well known one of Augustine, '*A necessitatibus meis libera me Domine.*' — G.

what afterwards we are ashamed of and repent for; or to be hindered from what we should do, by some prevailing passion.

But otherwise, infirmities are not when we *live* in them, when we make a habit of them. *Habitual sins are not sins of infirmity*, but the sins that we fall into, that we are overtaken with all of a sudden. Only, in some cases a man may live in a sin of infirmity when the ground of the infirmity is *rooted* within him, and he hasn't yet purged out the root. For instance, a man who is prone to anger by temperament, may live long in that infirmity, many times being inordinately pettish and peevish because he carries about him the root, the temperament of the body, and an inclination that way. Now, the Christian who lives in such an infirmity repents daily, and gains ground. He is still hewing at the root, until at length, at the last stroke, it *falls*, and he gets the victory over it.

Again, A sin of infirmity is *not a sin that we make excuses for*. A man is ashamed of his infirmities; he is grieved for them. Now when a man pleads for them and makes them a shelter and cover to continue in his sinful courses, they are not infirmities. Therefore, whoever pleads for sins reveals a false heart; his sins are enormities, not infirmities. A Christian gets the better of infirmities. After he falls, he rises stronger and stronger still. But when a man grows worse and worse, and is habituated in an evil course, it is not an infirmity, because he doesn't grow out of it. Let's not deceive ourselves with this plea, saying 'It is my weakness.' A Christian should be ashamed to plead this; *he should be able to do all things*.

Well, you see then this point is clear, that a Christian is an able man, he has a strength above nature in him, notwithstanding all his infirmities. This will appear more in the second branch, in the *generality* that he is able to do 'all things.'

To come to that, therefore, there are many things required of a Christian. *Christianity is a busy trade*.

- If we look up to **God**, what a world of things are required in a Christian to carry himself as he should do! A spirit of faith, a spirit of love, a spirit of joy, and *delight in Him above all*.
- And if we look to **men**, there are duties for a Christian to his *superiors*, a spirit of subjection; and there are duties to *equals*, to carry a spirit of love; and to *inferiors*, a spirit of pity and of bounty [*i.e.*, generosity].
- If we look to **Satan**, we have many duties, to resist him and to watch against the tempter.
- If we look to the **world**, it is full of snares. There must be a great deal of spiritual watchfulness, so that we are not surprised.
- If we look to **ourselves**, many duties are required: to carry our vessels in honor, and to walk within the compass of the Holy Ghost, to preserve the peace of our consciences, to walk answerable to our worth as sons of God and co-heirs with Christ.

The state of a Christian is no idle condition. Sometimes a Christian is in this state, sometimes in that; then he must have *these* graces, and shortly use *other* graces; he must have a suit [wardrobe] of all graces, fit for all conditions. Now, answerable to the variety of all the duties that are required of him, he must have *ability*; and therefore the apostle says, 'I can do all things through Christ.'

**5.** So then, the point of doctrine is this, *that the trial of a sincere Christian's estate is universality of obedience*. Universality of carriage in all conditions is the test of Christian sincerity. He must expend himself in no sin, and he must be a vessel prepared for every good work, 'a vessel of glory,' as the apostle says, 2Tim 2.21. He must balk at no service that God calls him to. What is the reason for this?

The reason is *because a Christian has the sanctifying Spirit; and the sanctifying Spirit has the seeds of all graces in it*; so that wherever is, there is the subduing of all sin in the root. And then all graces are answerable to the commandments of God in all duties, and to avoiding all sins. And therefore James says pregnantly to this purpose, he that 'offends in one is guilty of all,' v. 2.10.

**Use 1.** Let us take heed that *we don't plead immunity and freedom from some things*, and think that the good we do in one kind may excuse the bad we do in others. You have some who take liberty in an unclean conversation, because they are bountiful and liberal; and they take liberty to be oppressive in their callings, because they attend to the means of salvation. Oh no! Take heed of that carriage which is against the profession of religion. There must be a universal disposition to *all* graces and *all* duties, however contrary and cross to the corrupt nature they may be. The devil knows well where to have some men, for he sees they mind some sin, and are careless in the practice of other duties. And therefore, in the hour of temptation, the devil surprises such men; it will be a ground of despair if they don't take heed. Take the case of a man who says, 'I can part with all *other* things, Oh, but I cannot die.' Or 'I can be content to be imprisoned, but I cannot endure to be *disgraced*.' Let a man expend and favor himself in but one thing, and when the time comes, he will be revealed to be but a hypocrite. Then Satan will work upon that thing, and there the man will be shaken in his condition.

Because he didn't learn self-denial perfectly, he doesn't have grace disposing him to the practice of *all* Christian duties. He hasn't learned to know God *in covenant*, to supply his lack of honor, credit, wife and children, and all that he is to *part with* for Christ's sake. He hasn't learned this in resoluteness — even if God hasn't yet called him to it in experience — by entering into his own soul, and asking himself what he can part with, and what he can resist for Christ's sake. 'What can I endure? What can I suffer?' If his heart doesn't tell him, 'I can part with *all*. I would rather endure death itself, rather endure shame or anything else, than break the peace of a good conscience, and grieve the Spirit of God' — if he cannot thus answer his soul, then surely I can speak little comfort to that man. For we see that a Christian must be able to do *all things*; that is, to *resist all ill*, to *practice all duty*, and to *break off all sinful courses*.

**Quest.** But some will object, May not a Christian be subject to some especial sin?

**Ans.** Yes, he may. God, for special purposes, will sometimes let men of eminent graces be subject to notable infirmities. But what then; do they *plead* for them? No, but when by temperament, or former habit, or as they find themselves more inclined one way than another, they gather especial strength against their especial sin. At the beginning of conversion, a blow is struck against the reigning sin that predominated before; as when Goliath was slain and all the rest fled, 1Sam 17.51, so grace strikes at this Goliath. In conversion, a main blow is given to sin. Perhaps something still remains that grace will be hewing away at; and therefore grace may stand with an especial sin that a man is inclined to. But as he labors to get all strength against this, as against others, so there is a strength of *direction*. You will find that when a Christian is subject to any infirmity, he will speak more learnedly, more judiciously, and with greater detestation against that sin that he is most prone to, than against any other. He labors to make up the breach where the wall is weakest. So a man may be a good man, and yet be subject to an infirmity; but then he gathers more strength against it.

**Use 2.** Well, you see then that a Christian is able to do all things through Christ who strengthens him. I beseech you, let us often enter into ourselves, and make *use of a trial*, of what has been said about what we can do, what we can part with, and what we can resist. Let us never think we are in an estate that is fit to comfort us, till we can in truth and sincerity of heart, renounce all things whatsoever. Notwithstanding, this must be understood *evangelically*: 'I can do all things.' What! Do all things *legally*, without a flaw? No, 'I can do all things' so far as showing that I am a true Christian and not a hypocrite; so far as being beautiful in the eyes of others, to allure them to embrace religion; so far as making base spirits envy my even carriage, and see the power of religion; so far as putting the world to silence for reproaching us; so far as enjoying an assurance of the truth of grace; so far as Satan not getting his will in every sin. Our obedience is *evangelical*, and *not legal*.

**Quest.** Now, what is it to do all things *evangelically*? — to clear that point.

**Ans.** To do all things evangelically is first of all, for a man to know that he is in a state of grace, that he has his sins pardoned, and that he is accepted in Christ unto life and salvation. *That is the ground of all evangelical obedience.* He must know that he is in the Covenant of Grace; that he has the forgiveness of his sins, and a right to life everlasting in Christ. And then comes obedience answerable to that condition; that is, a desire to obey God in all things: a grief that he cannot do it so well as he would; a prayer that he might do it so; and an endeavor together with prayer that he may do so; and some strength, likewise with endeavor. For a Christian, as I said before, has the Spirit of God, not only to set him to endeavor, but to give him some strength to do it. So there is a desire, purpose, prayer, grief of heart, endeavor, and likewise some *strength* in evangelical obedience.

A Christian then in the gospel can do all things when he has his sins forgiven and is accepted in Christ, when he can endeavor to do all and desires to do all, and in some measure practices all duties in truth. For the gospel requires truth and not perfection. *That is the perfection that brings us to heaven in Christ our Savior.* We have a title to heaven; but the ground is *in Him* because forgiveness of sins is in Him. Now, a Christian's life is but to walk worthy of this, to fit himself for that glorious condition that he has title to by Christ, and to walk sincerely before God. *Sincerity* is the perfection of Christians. Don't let Satan therefore abuse us. We do all things when we *endeavor* to do all things, and *purpose* to do all things, and are *grieved* when we cannot do better. For mark, this always goes with evangelical obedience. God pardons that which is ill, for He is a Father. He has bound himself to pardon: 'I will pity you as a father pities his child,' Psa 103.13. From the very relation that He has taken upon him, we may be assured that he will pity and pardon us; and then he will accept that which is good, because it is the work of his own Spirit, and will reward it. This He will do in the Covenant of Grace. A Christian can do *all* then; and where he fails, God will pardon him. What is good, God will accept and reward; and what is sick and weak in him, God will heal, till he has made him up in Christ. <sup>Heb 13.21</sup>

Thus we see in what sense this is to be understood: *a Christian can do all things through Christ.* For as it is said of gold, that the best gold you have allows for such imperfections, so take the best Christian: you must have some allowance. Some imperfection clings to him. He cannot do all things perfectly. For then what need would there be of the Covenant of Grace? He can do all things such that he flies to the mercy of God in Christ for life everlasting. He can do all things required of a Christian in the Covenant of Grace, regarding sincerity. These things must be well and soundly understood, and then we can take no offence at the doctrine.

**Quest.** What then is the cause that a Christian fails when he does fail?

**Ans. 1.** A Christian fails *when he doesn't understand the promises of the new covenant of grace* – that God has given not only promises of the pardon of sin, but of all kinds of graces, a promise of the Spirit in general. He will give his Spirit to those who ask it, and a promise of every other particular grace: a promise that He will write His law in our hearts, He will teach us to love one another, and He will put his fear into our hearts. We don't have a grace unless there is a promise of it generally or specially. Now, when a Christian forgets this, he fails for lack of understanding these privileges and promises.

**Ans. 2.** Again, he fails *for lack of wisdom to plant himself in such helps by which he might be able to do all things.* For it is sometimes the folly of Christians to be rash in venturing into risky situations; and then he has no more strength than Samson had when he ventured. He loses his strength when he ventures rashly. But if a Christian is wise to keep out of temptation, and to keep himself in good company and acquaintance, using holy means and helps to godliness, in which the Spirit works, then a wise Christian may perform all.

**Ans. 3.** Again, *for lack of resolution.* A Christian doesn't always go out with his spiritual armor on, as he should. He doesn't go out with a purpose to please God in all things, and to avoid all sins;

but his armor is loose about him. If a Christian would resolve, *in the power of God*, to break through all difficulties, and to do all duties, then God would second him. 'Arise, and be doing, and the Lord will be with you,' 1Chr 22.16. Let a Christian go on constantly in a good way, and he will experience God helping him. But without such manly resolutions, a Christian fails.

**Quest.** What is the reason that a Christian many times stands in strong and great duties, and is foiled in little duties?

**Ans.** Because he is watchful in the one, and careless in the other. Indeed, it is *lack of will*. If we would have strength, and would carry ourselves manfully, then we might have grace to carry ourselves even to the glory of our profession and to its credit. But we willingly favor corruption, and are not willing to put it out of ourselves to the utmost. Thereupon we lack much comfort that Christians should enjoy; and from this come many breaches in our life. In a word, if a Christian were careful, there is no duty that he might not perform in some measure. He may go wondrously high upwards, but always with this exception: that he never looks to be justified by it. For God has not so established the covenant; *justification is done by Christ*. And again, if he is careless, he may sink wondrously low. There is no sin but the sin against the Holy Ghost, that he may not fall into it in some manner.

*I hasten to the last point.* 'I can do all things.' But how? With what strength? 'Through Christ who strengthens me.'

This is to salve an objection which might be made against the blessed apostle when he says, 'I can do all things' — here is a proud word. Oh no, for 'it is in Christ who strengthens me.' Paul was wondrously cautious and careful to avoid spiritual pride or the least touch of it, as in 1Cor 15.10. 'Not I,' he says. He checks himself quickly: 'I labored more than they all did; *not I*, but grace within me.' Of all other sins, take heed of spiritual pride; check it quickly. 'I can do all.' Oh, but lest proud thoughts arise, 'it is *in Christ* who strengthens me.' My strength is outside of myself. As the heads of those rivers that ran through paradise, and watered the city of God, were *outside* of paradise, so the head and spring of those streams that water the church of God, and particular Christians, are *outside* of themselves: *they are in Christ*. It is otherwise with us than it was in the 'first Adam.' He had strength, but he had no promise to stand. He had *power* to stand if he *would*. But a Christian's strength is outside of himself, in the 'second Adam,' Christ. And it is well that it is in the keeping of so strong a Savior; for we would forfeit it as Adam did, if it were in our own hands. It is derived to us, as much as He thinks good; but the *spring* is in Him. And then we have not only a will to do good, but the promise and the ability to do it; for we can do *all* through *Christ*.

**6.** So the point of the doctrine is this, *that the origin of a Christian's strength is in Christ*. God is the origin of all strength. But God himself has no intercourse by the New Covenant with man, outside of the Second Person [of the Godhead]. All our comfort, and all our grace, come through Christ. Having taken our nature upon him, and having satisfied God, he is fit to derive all grace and comfort to us. For he is near us; he is of our nature; and God in him is well pleased. So that, we may now go boldly to Christ; for we are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. God himself outside of Christ is 'a consuming fire.' But now in Christ God *favours* man; He is gracious and lovely to us, and we to him — because Christ his beloved Son has taken our nature upon him, and now *in our nature*, he is in heaven. So Christ the Mediator is the fountain of all strength; he is the spiritual Joseph who had laid up stores for all Egypt, and for all who came. He is the high steward of his church, the second in the kingdom of heaven; he is the Joseph; he dispenses all riches and treasures; all these are in Him for the church's sake. In Him we do all things. As we can do all things *for* Him as a Mediator who died for us and procured favor for us, so we can do all things *in* Him as a head to whom we are united. For there must be union before there can be communion. As in marriage, there must be a uniting before there is a communion of estates and conditions, so before we can do anything *for* Christ we must be *in* Christ. We have all as *through Christ*, as *in Christ*.

From there comes communion with CHRIST'S SPIRIT. So then, it is Christ *by his Spirit*, for he does all by his Spirit: 'The Lord is *that Spirit*,' 2Cor 3.17. Christ does all in the church *by his Spirit*. Now, the Spirit is the union of Christ; he strengthens all; all our strength is by Christ's Spirit. Now, this Spirit of God first sanctifies Christ, the human nature of Christ, before he sanctifies us. We have all grace, power, and strength second-hand. It doesn't come from Christ as God immediately. And grace doesn't come from the Holy Ghost immediately to us; but the Holy Ghost first sanctifies Christ's human nature, and then He sanctifies us; and out of Christ's fulness, we receive grace for grace. <sup>Joh 1.16</sup> The same Spirit who sanctified Christ's nature in the womb of the virgin, and who sanctified his holy nature that he now has in heaven with him, the same Spirit is sent *from Him* to sanctify every member of the church. All is in the Head, Joh 1.16. As the ointment was first poured on Aaron's head, and from there it ran down to the skirts of his garments, Psa 133.2, so all grace is poured upon the head of Christ first, and then from Him down upon the skirts, even upon the lowliest Christian, according to their portion. And as to those things that God means to call them to, they will have grace to carry them. You see then how to conceive of this — how we have all in Christ, that is, by the Spirit of Christ, and how it comes by the Spirit.

**Use 1.** First of all, then, you see here how these two agree: a Christian, when he is a Christian, has freedom of will and power. He has power and free will. As far as he is freed by the Spirit of Christ, so far he is free. For in 2Cor 3.17, 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is *liberty*.' So in Joh 8.36, Christ says, 'If the Son makes you free, then you will be free indeed.' 'He can do all things,' and therefore he is free. But it is *in Christ*; and therefore his freedom is *from Him*. We speak, but it is Christ's Spirit who opens our mouth. We believe, but it is Christ by his Spirit who opens our hearts to believe. We are mighty, but it is in God. We are able to do great matters, but it is in Christ who strengthens us. We are strong, but it is in the Lord — as it is written, 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,' Eph 6.10. The understanding is ours, the affections are ours, the will is ours — but the sanctifying of all this, and the carriage of all these supernaturally above themselves, to do them *spiritually*, that is not ours, but Christ's. So we see what is ours, and what is *not* ours. We are able to do; but the strength, and the grace, and ability are from Christ. A wind instrument sounds, but the man makes it sound by his breath. We are like wind instruments. Indeed, we sound, but no further than we are blown upon; and we yield music, but no further than we are touched by the Spirit of God. We are light, but only as the air is enlightened by the sun. And therefore we must understand these points, so that *God* may have glory, and we may know what is *ours*.

And then again, we see here *that we have in Christ not only a general ability, that we are able, but we have the very act itself, the deed itself*. He strengthens us. There is a spiritual life and a spiritual power and will, and *then* the act and deed itself. Now, we have from Christ not only the life of grace at first, and then a spiritual power answerable to that again, by which our powers are renewed so that we're able to do something in our own will — but we have the deed itself. The *doing* is from Christ; he strengthens us for the present. Now, you have some who teach this point loosely — that we have general universal grace, by which we are enabled, *if we will*, to believe, and to do this thing, *if we will*. But I say that is not all; rather, we have the will *and* the deed itself from Christ by his Spirit; and in every holy action, Christ helps us to do these things indeed.

First *He moves the soul to the action, and then He applies the soul to the thing*. By the Spirit he does this. For though we have power, we could not exercise it in this or that particular act, if not by the Spirit.

Second, again, *He works a preserving of the grace in that act*. God preserves his own work against temptation, and against impediments; for there is no act that is not opposed. The devil is in every good work, either at the beginning to hinder it, or at the end to defile it — one way or other. Now, God preserves his own work by his Spirit. *First*, He moves us to do, and then he preserves us in the doing, and arms us against impediments to good works. Then he determines the good work,

and limits it — how far we will do well, this far, and that — the degrees come from Christ. For sometimes he does it *by His glorious power*, as Paul says, Eph 1.19. Sometimes we are strengthened to do more, and sometimes less, as He wills. Not only the act itself, and the application of the soul, and the preserving of grace in every act — for we sink otherwise — but the *degree* that we sometimes do better, comes from Christ, now strengthening us more, and then less, as He sees fit.

Know, by the way, that *He is a voluntary Head*. Though he is a head of influence that flows into every member, yet He is a voluntary head, according to his own good pleasure and the needs of his members. Sometimes we need more grace, and then it flows into us from Him accordingly. Sometimes we need to know our weakness, and then he leaves us to ourselves, so that we may know that *without* him we cannot stand; that we may know the *necessity* of his guidance to heaven in sensing our imperfections; that we might see our *weakness and corruptions* that we thought we didn't have: as Moses, a meek man, was tempted to murmur, Num 11.21, *seq.*; and David, a mild man, was tempted to cruelty, 2Sam 11.15. They thought they didn't have those corruptions in themselves. God sometimes leaves Christians to themselves, so that they may know that they are not strong by their own spirit. So the degrees are from Christ, sometimes more and sometimes less. Sometimes we are deserted so that we may know the manner of Christ's governing us till we come to heaven.

**Use 1.** Well, I beseech you, let us know that outside of Christ there is no grace. A civil man does nothing in religion well. There cannot be a beam without the sun; there cannot be a river without a spring; there cannot be a good work without the spring of good works, who is *Christ*. Therefore, we should fetch *all* from him since there is no grace outside of him *at all*.

**Use 2.** Again, let us be sure in all particular actions, to be poor in spirit. When we have any temptation to resist, any trouble to bear, or any duty to do, *let us empty ourselves*. No grace is stronger than HUMILITY. No man is weaker than a proud man. For a proud man rests on nothing; but a humble man who empties himself, stands upon the Rock. We should therefore make use of the strength of Christ, who has not only abundance for himself, but an abundance for us, an overflowing for every Christian, for his good. *Let us empty ourselves*, as the prophet says to the widow: Bring 'empty vessels' now, and we will have oil enough, 2Kng 4.3. There is enough in Christ — but *first* we must empty ourselves by humility, and *then* there is fulness in Him. 'Of his fulness we receive grace for grace,' Joh 1.16. His fulness is like the fulness of the clouds, ready to drop, and like the fulness of breasts, ready to yield what they have. *He is willing*. It is our fault, and baseness, and pride that hinder us. *Let us*, as much as we can, *empty ourselves of ourselves*, and stir up the SPIRIT OF FAITH. *Go to Christ*. So much faith as we carry, so much grace we bring from Him. If we but touch him by faith, the issue of our corruptions will be dried up in some measure, and we will have a spring of graces in us answerable to the graces in him, Mat 9.20.

I beseech you, therefore, let us labor for these two graces, especially since in the Covenant of Grace *all* is outside of us. Not only is salvation outside of us, but the grace that brings us to heaven is outside of us, to empty ourselves in HUMILITY, and by FAITH to go to Christ. The one grace makes us go out of ourselves; the other carries us to Christ and to the promises of Christ. Learn to do this in every action, for we may be foiled in every particular action for lack of humility and faith. We must not trust to any grace or any ability in us, but trust to our *Spring* — go to Christ when we have anything to do.

**Quest.** What is the reason that Christians fail?

**Ans.** They think, 'I had grace yesterday and before,' and upon this, they don't go to Christ for a supply of new strength. Know that in every act, in every temptation, in every particular suffering, we need a particular new strength, and a greater strength than we had before, if the temptation is greater, if the work is greater. As with a porter, he cannot carry a new burden that is heavier than

he carried before, without a new strength, without more strength than he had before. So too, a Christian cannot bear a new affliction without *new* strength, without *more* strength. Therefore, consider what the nature of the business is that we are to do, and the strength of the temptation that we are to encounter, and accordingly go to Christ for a measure greater than we had before. He never upbraids us nor ‘casts us in the teeth,’ as James says, chap. 1:5.<sup>8</sup> There is an *art*, a *skill* to fetching strength from Christ to do all things, if we would learn it. As there is a *skill* to being a Christian, *it is a trade*; and so there is a skill to fetch the strength that He has, from his Spring, from Christ. Now, in a word, that skill is this:

1. First, *To know our own want, and to know the necessity of grace, and the excellency of the state of holiness* — that of all conditions, holiness is the best; and of all conditions, a sinful estate is the worst. This will make us go out of ourselves to Christ. Well, how will we fetch strength from Christ then?

2. *Consider the reason why Christ has the treasures of all in Himself*, and go to him for whatever particular graces we want. When we know the excellency and necessity of it before, then make use of the virtue of his death and resurrection. Thus, are we tempted to any sin? Make use of the death of Christ, of his great love in giving himself; and then of the holiness of God in giving Christ to die for sin, He hates sin so; and then,

3. *Consider the fruit of his death* that was to free and deliver us from sin. When we think of these things, ask, ‘Did God and Christ so love me? Is it the holiness of God, and the holiness of Christ, that God became man to die for *me*? And will I then go and trifle with and be tempted to sin, and offend so holy and so gracious a God, who hates sin so infinitely?’

These are strong reasons fetched from Christ. We have from him both the reasons why we should do good, and why we should *not* do evil; and we have the strength. There are two things requisite for a man to do a thing as a man: the reason why he should do it, and the strength to perform it. And both these are from Christ.

As we are stopped from doing ill by the consideration of Christ’s *death*, so when we are moved to grace, consider the virtue of Christ’s *resurrection*. Why is Christ now in heaven in our nature? Is it not to fill his church with his Spirit? Why does he make intercession in heaven? Is it not that we should not be discouraged despite our daily infirmities? Will we not make use of it? He is glorious for *us* — not for himself, but for his mystical body. As he has made his natural body glorious, so he will make his mystical body glorious, little by little. Therefore, with Him in heaven making intercession, go to him in want of grace; and so too for infirmities. The Spirit of God raised him at the lowest; and will the Spirit of God not raise me from this and that? *Yes*, the Spirit of God will raise me from the baseness and misery of sin, to be better and better. The same Spirit that raised his body, will enable me. And so, fetch virtue and strength from Christ; make use of Christ for every turn. Oh, that we could learn these things! Then we would be able to go through all conditions: we would be able to live, able to die. I beseech you, therefore, consider what has been said. Let us study Christ every day more and more, not for redemption and reconciliation only, though do that in the first place, but *study Christ to be all in all to us*, to be our sanctification to fit us for heaven. Study the promises in Christ; lose no privilege. God would not have left them in his Word, if not for our good. Take heed of base despair, ‘Oh, I’ll never overcome this and that sin.’ What! shut the people out of Canaan? Base despair lost them *earthly* Canaan, Num 14.22f. So take heed that it does not shut you out of *heavenly* Canaan — ‘I won’t be able to get the victory over sin, and I won’t be able to suffer.’ No! What are the promises? And why is Christ in heaven?

By despair and base infidelity shall we lose Christ and the promises, and all that is put into our hands, and basely betray our souls to Satan? I beseech you, consider the *necessity* of these things.

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<sup>8</sup> The verb is ὀνειδίζοντος, which the authorized version in Mat. 27.44, renders precisely as Sibbes does here. - G.

We don't know what times God may call us to before long. Don't despair beforehand. Let fall what will — *get into Christ*, to be in him in a happy and eternal condition. We will have strength from him to carry ourselves in *all* estates. Come what will, he will stand by us; he will not fail us nor forsake us.

Consider, when did Paul speak these glorious words? *In prison*. 'I can do all things through Christ,' etc. Did the Spirit of God leave Paul in prison? Wasn't it better for Paul to have grace than to be freed from the thing? Wicked men may be freed *from* trouble; only a Christian has grace to carry himself well *in* trouble. Come what will, if we are in Christ, either we will be freed from troubles, or we will have grace to bear them. Either we will have what we want, or we will have contentment without it. Isn't it better to have grace without the thing? Isn't it better to have a glorious Spirit of glory resting on us? Didn't the Spirit of glory rest on Paul? Couldn't God have freed Paul from prison? *Yes*. But where then would be the demonstration of a contented spirit, or a heavenly mind? Where would this example of a Christian comfortably bearing the cross have been? *Paul lost nothing*. Here you see how many stars shine in the night of his affliction, what a luster he had in the dark state of imprisonment. Will *we* then be afraid of any condition? No! Get the Spirit of God; get understanding of Christ, and of the promises and privileges we have by Him; and then let God cast us into whatever condition He will, we shall be safe and well.