

The Rare Jewel of Chri Conten

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JEREMIAH BURROUGH

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The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and 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 which strengtheneth me." —*Philippians 4:11-13*

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646)

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Short Biography of Jeremiah Burroughs

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Part One: Contentment

1. Christian Contentment Described

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." —*Philippians 4:11*

This text contains a very timely cordial[1] 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.

Our great Apostle holds forth experimentally in this text the very life and soul of all practical divinity. In it, we may plainly read his own proficiency in the school of Christ and what lesson every Christian who would prove the power and growth of godliness in his own soul must necessarily learn from him. These words are brought in by Paul as a clear argument to persuade the Philippians that he did not seek after great things in the world, and that he sought not "theirs" but "them." He did not long for great wealth; his heart was taken up with better things. "I do not speak," he says, 'in respect of want',[2] for whether I have or have not, my heart is fully satisfied, I have enough: 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.' "

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

"*Therewith to be content.*" The word rendered "content" here has great elegance and fullness of meaning in the original. In the strict sense, it is only attributed to God, Who has styled Himself "God all-sufficient," in that He rests fully satisfied in and with Himself alone. But He is pleased freely to communicate His fullness to the creature, so that from God in Christ the saints receive "grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). As a result, there is in them the same grace that is in Christ, according to their measure. In this sense, Paul says, I have a "self-sufficiency," which is what the word means.

You will say, "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" (2Co 3:5). Therefore his meaning must be, "I find

a sufficiency of satisfaction in my own heart, through the grace of Christ that is in me. Though I have not outward comforts and worldly conveniences to supply my necessities, yet I have a sufficient portion between Christ and my soul abundantly to satisfy me in every condition." This interpretation agrees with, "A good man is satisfied from himself " (Pro 14:14), and with Paul of himself: "…having nothing yet possessing all things" (2Co 6:10). Because he had a right to the covenant and promise, which virtually contains everything, and an interest in Christ, the fountain and good of all, it is no marvel that he said that in whatsoever state he was in, he was content.

Thus you have the true interpretation of the text. I shall not make any division of the words because I take them only to promote the one most necessary duty: *quieting and comforting the hearts of God's people under the troubles and changes they meet with in these heart-shaking times*.

The doctrinal conclusion briefly is this: *That to be well skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment is the duty, glory, and excellence of a Christian.* This evangelical truth is held forth sufficiently in the Scripture, yet we may take one or two more parallel places to confirm it. In 1 Timothy 6:6 and 8, you find expressed both the duty and the glory of it. "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (6:8)—there is the duty. "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (6:6)—there is the glory and excellence of it, as if to suggest that godliness were not gain *except contentment be with it*. The same exhortation you have in Hebrews: "Let your conversation[3] be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have" (Heb 13:5).

To explain and prove the above conclusion, I shall endeavor to demonstrate four things:

1. The nature of this Christian contentment: What it is (chapter 1).
2. The art and mystery of it (chapter 2).
3. What lessons must be learned to bring the heart to contentment (ch. 3).
4. Wherein the glorious excellence of this grace chiefly consists (ch. 4).

I offer the following description: *Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights*

in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.[4] This description is a box of precious ointment and very comforting and useful for troubled hearts in troubled times and conditions.

1. Contentment is a sweet, inward heart-thing.

It is a work of the spirit indoors. It is not only that we do not seek to help ourselves by outward violence or that we forbear from discontented and murmuring expressions with perverse words; but it is the inward submission of the heart. "Truly, my soul waiteth upon God" and "My soul, wait thou only upon God" (Psa 62:1, 5)—so it is in your Bibles, but the words may be translated as correctly: "My soul, be thou silent unto God. Hold thy peace, O my soul." Not only must the tongue hold its peace; the soul must be silent. Many may sit silently, refraining from discontented expressions, yet *inwardly* they are bursting with discontented expressions—they are bursting with discontent! This shows a complicated disorder and great perversity in their hearts. Notwithstanding their outward silence, God hears the peevish,[5] fretful language of their souls. A shoe may be smooth and neat outside, while inside it pinches the flesh. Outwardly, there may be great calmness and stillness, yet within: amazing confusion, bitterness, disturbance, and vexation.

2. Contentment is the quiet of the heart.

All is sedate[6] and still there. That you may understand this better, I would add that this quiet frame of spirit is not opposed to certain things.

a. What contentment is not opposed to

1. *It is not opposed to a due sense of affliction*. God gives His people leave to be sensible of what they suffer. Christ does not say, "Do not count as a cross what is a cross"; He says, "Take up your cross daily" (Luk 9:23).

2. *It is not opposed to making in an orderly manner our moan to God and to our friends*.

3. *It is not opposed to all lawful seeking for help in different circumstances*, or to endeavoring simply to be delivered out of present afflictions by the use of lawful means—it is but my duty. God is thus far mercifully indulgent to our weakness, and He will not take it ill at our hands if by earnest and importunate[7] prayer we seek Him for deliverance until

we know His good pleasure in the matter. Certainly seeking thus for help with such submission and holy resignation[8] of spirit to be delivered when God wills, as God wills, and how God wills—this is not opposed to the quietness that God requires in a contented spirit.

b. What contentment is opposed to

But what, then, it will be asked, is this quietness of spirit opposed to?

1. *It is opposed to murmuring and repining* [9] *at the hand of God*, as the discontented Israelites often did. If we cannot bear this either in our children or servants, much less can God bear it in us.

2. *To vexing and fretting*, which is a degree beyond murmuring.

3. *To tumultuousness*[10] *of spirit*, when the thoughts run distractingly and work in a confused manner, so that the affections are like the unruly multitude in the Acts, who did not know for what purpose they had come together. The Lord expects you to be silent under His rod, and, as was said in Acts 19:36, "Ye ought to be quiet and to do nothing rashly." [11]

4. *It is opposed to an unsettled and unstable spirit*, whereby the heart is distracted from the present duty that God requires in our several relationships—towards God, others, and ourselves. We should prize duty more highly than to be distracted by every trivial occasion.

5. *It is opposed to distracting, heart-consuming cares.* A gracious heart[12] so esteems its union with Christ and the work that God sets it about, that it will not willingly suffer anything to come in to choke it or deaden it. A Christian is desirous that the Word of God should take such full possession as to divide between soul and spirit (Heb 4:12), but he would not allow the fear and noise of evil tidings to take such a hold in his soul as to make a division and struggling there, like the twins in Rebekah's womb (Gen 25:22).

6. *It is opposed to sinking discouragements*. God would have us to depend on Him though we do not see how the thing may be brought about; otherwise, we do not show a quiet spirit.

7. *It is opposed to sinful shiftings and shirkings*[13] *to get relief and help.* Thus do many, through the corruption of their hearts and the weakness of their faith, because they are not able to trust God and follow Him fully in all things and always. For this reason, the Lord often follows the saints with many sore temporal crosses as we see in the case of Jacob, though they obtain the mercy. It may be that your carnal heart thinks, "I do not care how

I am delivered, if only I may be freed from it." Your hearts are far from being quiet!

8. The last thing that quietness of spirit is the opposite of is *desperate risings of the heart against God by way of rebellion*. That is the most abominable. They find in their hearts something of a rising against God. Their thoughts begin to bubble, and their affections begin to move in rebellion against God Himself. This is especially the case with those, who besides their corruptions, have a large measure of melancholy. The devil works both upon the corruptions of their hearts and the melancholy disease of their bodies.

Now Christian quietness is opposed to all these things. When affliction comes, whatever it is, you do not murmur or repine, you do not fret or vex yourself.

3. Contentment is an inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit.

It is an inward frame of spirit and a gracious frame. Contentment is a soul business.

a. *It is a grace that spreads itself through the whole soul*. In some, there is a partial contentment. It is not the [whole] frame of the soul, but [only] some part of the soul has some contentment. Many a man may be satisfied in his judgment about a thing, who cannot for his life rule his affections, his thoughts, or his will. I do not doubt that many of you know this in your own experience, if you observe the workings of your own hearts. But there is a great deal of hope of attaining contentment, if you can sit down and say, "I see good reason to be contented." Yet even when you have [gotten this] far, you may still have much to do with your hearts afterwards. There is such unruliness in our thoughts and affections that our judgments are not always able to rule them. That is what makes me say that contentment is an inward frame of spirit. The whole soul—judgment, thoughts, will, affections—all are satisfied and quiet.

b. *Spiritual contentment comes from the frame of the soul*. The contentment of a man or woman who is rightly content does not come so much from outward arguments or help, as from the disposition of their own hearts. Let me explain myself. Someone is disturbed. If you come and bring some great thing to please him, perhaps it will quiet him, and he will be

"contented." It is the thing you bring that quiets him, not the disposition of his own spirit, but the external thing you bring him. But when a Christian is content in the right way, the quiet comes more from the disposition of his own heart than from any external argument or from the possession of anything in the world. To be content because of some external thing is like warming a man's clothes by the fire. But to be content through an inward disposition of the soul is like the warmth that a man's clothes have from the natural heat of the body.

c. It is the frame of spirit that shows the habitual character of this grace of contentment. Contentment is not merely one act—just a flash in a good mood. You find many men and women who, if they are in a good mood, will be very quiet. But this will not hold. It is not the constant tenor of their spirits to be holy and gracious under affliction.

4. Contentment is a gracious frame, opposed to natural quietness.

Indeed, in contentment there is a compound of all graces. But now the gracious frame of spirit is in opposition to three things:

a. *In opposition to the natural quietness of many men and women.* Some are so constituted by nature that they are more still and quiet. Others are of a violent and hot constitution, and they are more impatient.

b. *In opposition to a sturdy resolution.* Some men through the strength of a sturdy resolution do not seem to be troubled, come what may. So they are not disquieted as much as others.

c. *By way of distinction from the strength of natural (though unsanctified) reason* that may quiet the heart in some degree.

But now I say that a gracious frame of spirit is not merely a stillness of the body that comes from its natural constitution and temper, nor a sturdy resolution, nor the strength of reason. You will ask, "In what way is the grace of contentment distinguished from all these?" Where contentment of heart springs from grace, the heart is very quick and lively[14] in the service of God! The difference is very clear: The one whose *disposition* is quiet is not disquieted as others are, but neither does he show any activeness of spirit to sanctify[15] the name of God in his affliction. But, on the other hand, he whose contentment is *of grace* keeps his heart quiet with

regard to vexation and trouble and *at the same time* is not dull or heavy, but very active to sanctify God's name in the affliction that he is experiencing.

I will give you just one mark of the difference between a man or woman who is content in a natural way and one who is content in a spiritual way: Those who are content in a natural way when outward afflictions befall them are just as content when they commit sin against God. When they have outward crosses or when God is dishonored, it is all one to them whether they themselves are crossed or whether God is crossed. But a gracious heart that is contented with its own affliction will rise up strongly when God is dishonored.

5. Contentment is freely submitting to and taking pleasure in God's disposal.

It is a free work of the spirit. There are [several] things to be explained in this freedom of spirit:

a. *That the heart is readily brought over*. When someone does a thing freely, he does not need a lot of moving to get him to do it. Many men and women, when afflictions are heavy upon them, may be brought to a state of contentment with great ado.[16] [But] when a man is free in a thing, only mention it and immediately he does it. So if you have learned this art of contentment, as soon as you come to see that it is the hand of God, your heart acts readily and closes at once.

b. *It is free, that is, not by constraint,* not, as we say, patience by force. Thus, many will say that you must be content: "This is the hand of God and you cannot help it." Oh, but this is too low an expression for Christians. Yet when Christians come to visit one another, they say, "Friend, you must be content." *Must be* content is too low for a Christian; no, it should be, "Readily and freely I will be content." It is suitable to my heart to yield to God and to be content.

Now a free act comes in a rational manner. That is freedom. It does not come through ignorance because I know of no better condition or because I do not know why my affliction is; but it comes through a sanctified judgment. Freedom is when I, by my judgment, see what is to be done, understand the thing; and my judgment agrees with what I understand.

c. *This freedom is in opposition to mere stupidity*. A man or woman may be contented merely from lack of sense. This is not free any more than

a man who is paralyzed and does not feel when you nip him is patient freely. But if some should have their flesh pinched and feel it, and yet for all that can control themselves and do it freely, that is another matter.

6. Contentment is freely submitting to God's disposal.

Submitting to God's disposal—what is that? The word *submit* signifies nothing else but "to send under." Thus, in one who is discontented, the heart will be unruly and would even get above God as far as discontent prevails. But now comes the grace of contentment and sends it under. Is the hand of God bringing an affliction, yet my heart is troubled and discontented? "What," it says, "will you be above God? Is this not God's hand, and must your will be regarded more than God's?" O under, under! Get you under, O soul! Keep under the authority of God, the power that God has over you! To keep under—that is to submit. The soul can submit to God at the time when it can *send itself under* the power, authority, sovereignty, and dominion that God has over it.

That is the sixth point, but even that is not enough. You have not attained this grace of contentment unless the next point is true of you.

7. Contentment is taking pleasure in God's disposal.

Not only do I see that I should be content in this affliction, but I see that there is good in it. I find there is honey in this rock, and so I do not only say, "I must submit to God's hand." No, the hand of God is good, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Psa 119:71). To acknowledge that it is just that I am afflicted is possible in one who is not truly contented. I may be convinced that God deals justly in this matter, but that is not enough! You must say, "Good is the hand of the Lord" (Ezr 7:9; Psa 104:28). The righteous man can never be made so poor, to have his house so rifled and spoiled, but there will remain much treasure within. The presence of God and the blessing of God are upon him, and therein is much treasure.

It is no marvel, therefore, that Paul was content; for a verse or two after my text you read, "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? He had no

bread to eat. He was often in nakedness, put in the stocks and whipped, and cruelly used. “Yet I have all,” says Paul, for all that. “As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2Co 6:10).

8. Contentment is submitting and taking pleasure in God’s disposal.

A contented heart looks to and submits to God’s disposal, that is, he sees the wisdom of God in everything. In his submission, he sees His *sovereignty*; but what makes him take pleasure in God’s *wisdom*? [It is this:] the Lord knows how to order things better than I. I only see things 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 should have been undone! I know that the love of God may as well stand with an afflicted condition as with a prosperous condition.

9. The last thing is this: Submission must be in every condition.

In whatever affliction befalls us, there must be a submission to God’s disposal in every condition.

a. *As to the kind of affliction.* Many men and women will *in general* say that they must submit to God in affliction. I suppose that if you were to go now from one end of this congregation to the other and speak thus to every soul: “Would you not submit to God’s disposal, in whatever condition He might place you?” you would say, “God forbid that it should be otherwise!” But we have a saying: There is a great deal of deceit in *general* statements. In general, you would submit to anything; but what if it is in this or that particular case that crosses you most?—then, anything but that! We are usually apt to think that any condition is better than that condition in which God has placed us. Now, this is not contentment; it should be not only to any condition in general, but for the kind of affliction that *most* crosses you. God, it may be, strikes you in your child—“Oh, if it had been in my possessions,” you say, “I would be content!” Perhaps He strikes you in your marriage—“Oh,” you say, “I would rather have been stricken in my

health." And if He had struck you in your health—"Oh, then, if it had been in my trading,[17] I would not have cared." But we must not be our own carvers. Whatever *particular* afflictions God may place us in, we must be content in them.

b. *There must be a submission to God in every affliction, as to the time and continuance of it*. "Perhaps I could submit and be content," says someone, "but this affliction has been on me a long time—three months, a year, many years. I do not know how to yield and submit to it; my patience is worn out and broken." Or if it were the withdrawing of God's face—"Yet if this had been but for a little time I could submit; but to seek God for so long and still He does not 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.

c. *And then for the variety of our condition*. We must be content with the particular affliction, the time, and all the circumstances about the affliction—sometimes the circumstances are greater afflictions than the afflictions themselves—and for the variety. God may exercise us with various afflictions one after another…many who have been plundered and come away, afterwards have fallen sick and died. They had fled for their lives, and afterwards the plague has come among them. And if not that affliction, it may be some other.

It is very rarely that one affliction comes alone. Oh, that [it] could be said of many Christians that though their circumstances are changed, yet that nobody could see them changed; they are the same! Did you see 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.

2. The Mystery of Contentment

There is a great mystery and art in what way a Christian comes to contentment. Grace teaches us how to make a mixture of gracious joy and gracious sorrow together—how to moderate and order an affliction so that there shall be a sense of it, and yet for all that contentment under it.

1. The first thing is to show that there is a great mystery in it.

It may be said of one who is contented in a Christian way, "He is the most contented man in the world, and yet the most unsatisfied man in the world." These two together [are] mysterious. You 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 also the most unsatisfied man in the world*. You will say, "How is that?" A man who has learned the art of contentment is the most contented with any low condition that he has in the world, and yet he cannot be satisfied with the enjoyment of all the world. Godliness teaches us this mystery! When Luther[18] was sent great gifts by dukes and princes, he refused them, and said, "I did vehemently protest that God should not put me off so; 'tis not that which will content me."

A soul that is capable of God can be filled with nothing else but God. Though a gracious heart knows that it was made for God, carnal hearts think without reference to God. But a gracious heart, being enlarged to be capable of God and enjoying somewhat of Him, can be filled by nothing in the world; it must only be God Himself. 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.

"And the *peace of God*, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phi 4:7). "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the *God of peace* shall be with you" (Phi 4:9). The *peace of God* shall keep you, and the *God of peace* shall be with you. Here is what I would observe from this text: The peace of God is not enough to a gracious heart except it may have the God of that peace. A carnal heart could be satisfied if he might but have outward peace, though it is not the peace of God; peace in

the state and his trading would satisfy him. But mark how a godly heart goes beyond a carnal: “All outward peace is not enough; I must have the peace of God.” But suppose you have the peace of God, will that not quiet you?—“No, I must have 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.” “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee” (Psa 73:25). There is nothing in heaven or earth that can satisfy me, but [God Himself].

2. A Christian comes to contentment not so much by way of addition, as by way of subtraction.

That is his way of contentment: not so much by adding to what he has, not by adding more to his condition, but rather by subtracting from his desires, to make his desires and his circumstances even and equal.

A carnal heart knows no way to be contented but this: I have such and such possessions, and if I had this added to them, then I should be contented. Perhaps I have lost my possessions; if I could only have given to me something to make up my loss, then I should be a contented man. But contentment does not come in that way; it comes by subtracting from your desires. It is all one to a Christian: either to attain what I do desire or to bring down my desires to what I have already attained.

Now I say that a heart that has no grace and is not instructed in this mystery of contentment, knows of no way to get contentment but to have his possessions raised up to his desires. But the Christian has another way to contentment, that is, he can bring his desires down to his possessions; and so he attains his contentment. Here lies the bottom and root of all contentment: *when there is an evenness and proportion between our hearts and our circumstances*. That is why many godly men who are in low position live more sweet and comfortable lives than those who are richer.

3. A Christian comes to contentment not so much by getting rid of the burden that is on him as by adding another burden to himself.

The way of contentment is to add another burden: the burden of sin. The heavier the burden of your sin is to your heart, the lighter will the burden of your affliction be to your heart, and so you shall come to be content!

4. It is not so much the removing of the affliction that is upon us as the changing of the affliction.

The way of contentment to a carnal heart is only the removing of the affliction: “O that it may be gone!” There is a power of grace to turn this affliction into good; it takes away the sting of it. Christianity will teach you how to turn your poverty to *spiritual riches*. You shall be poor still as to your outward possessions, but this shall be altered: whereas before it was a natural evil to you, it comes now to be turned to a spiritual benefit to you.

5. A Christian comes to this contentment not by making up the wants[19] of his circumstances, but by the performance of the work of his circumstances.

This is the way of contentment. There are some circumstances that I am in with many wants. Well, how shall I come to be satisfied and content? A carnal heart thinks, “I must have my wants made up or else it is impossible that I should be content.” But a gracious heart says, “What is the duty of the circumstances God has put me into? Indeed, my circumstances have changed. I was not long since in a prosperous state, but God has changed my circumstances. Now what am I to do? Let me exert my strength to perform the duties of my present circumstances.”

Others spend their thoughts on things that disturb and disquiet them, and so they grow more and more discontented. Let me spend my thoughts in thinking what my duty is. “O,” says a man whose condition is changed and who has lost his wealth, “Had I but my wealth, as I had heretofore, how I would use it to His glory!” But this may be but a temptation. You should rather labor to bring your heart to quiet and contentment by setting your soul to work in the duties of your present condition, and take heed of your thoughts about other conditions as a mere temptation!

6. A gracious heart is contented by the melting of his will and desires into God's will and desires.

This too is a mystery to a carnal heart. It is not by having his own desires satisfied, but by melting his will and desires into God's will. So that, in one sense, he comes to have his desires satisfied though he does not obtain the thing that he desired before, because *he makes his will to be at one with God's will*. This is a small degree higher than submitting to the will of God. 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 too.

Suppose a man were to make over his debt to another man. If the man to whom I owe the debt be satisfied and contented, I am satisfied because I have made it over to him. I need not be discontented and say, "My debt is not paid, and I am not satisfied." Yes, you are satisfied, for he to whom you made over your debt is satisfied. It is just the same, 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 I have no will of my own. A gracious heart must needs[20] have satisfaction in this way because godliness teaches him this: *to see that his good is more in God than in himself*. The good of my life, comforts, happiness, glory, and riches are more in God than in myself!

7. The mystery consists not in bringing anything from outside to make my condition more comfortable, but in purging out something that is within.

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (Jam 4:1). They are not so much from things outside, but from within. The way to contentment is to purge out your lusts and bitter humors.[21]

8. He lives upon the dew of God's blessing.

A Christian can get food that the world does not know of: he is fed in a secret way by the dew of the blessing of God. A poor man or woman who has but a little *with grace* lives a more contented life than his rich neighbor who has a great income. When your husbands are at sea and send you a token of their love, it is worth more than forty times what you already have in your houses. Every good thing the people of God enjoy, they enjoy in God's eternal love to them. This must needs be very sweet to them.

9. He can see love in all afflictions.

A Christian not only has the dew of God's blessing in good things and finds them very sweet, but in all the afflictions, all the evils that befall him, he can see love and can enjoy the sweetness of love in his afflictions as well as in his mercies.

10. A godly man sees Christ as Mediator.

A godly man has contentment as a mystery because just as he sees all his afflictions come from the same love that Jesus Christ did, so he sees them all sanctified in Jesus Christ, our Mediator.[22] He sees all the poison of them taken out by the virtue of Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and man. When a Christian would have contentment, he works it out thus: "What is my affliction? Is it poverty that God strikes me with?—Jesus Christ had not a house to hide His head in. Now my poverty is sanctified by Christ's poverty. I can see by faith the curse taken out of my poverty by the poverty of Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus was poor in this world to deliver me from the curse of my poverty. So my poverty is not afflictive, if I can be contented in such a condition." So if men jeer and scoff at you, did they not do so to Jesus Christ? Now I get contentment in the midst of scorns and jeers by considering that Christ was scorned and by acting faith[23] upon what Christ suffered for me. Am I in great bodily pain? Jesus Christ had as great pain in His body as I have. The exercising of faith on what Christ endured is the way to get contentment in the midst of our pains.

11. A gracious heart has contentment by getting strength from Jesus Christ.

He is able to bear his burden by getting strength from Someone else. The schools of the philosophers would count it ridiculous that you should be strengthened by the strength of someone else, who is not near you as far as you can see. But a Christian finds satisfaction in every circumstance by his faith bringing the strength of Jesus Christ into his own soul. He is thereby enabled to bear whatever God lays on him. Of His fullness do we receive "grace for grace" (Joh 1:16). Now if a man has a burden to bear and yet can have strength added to him, if the burden is doubled, he can have his strength trebled.[24] The burden will not be heavier, but lighter than it was before to his natural strength. "The Lord is…my strength (Psa 18:2).

12. A godly heart enjoys much of God in everything he has and knows how to make up all wants in God Himself.

If the children of God have their little taken from them, they can make up all their wants in God Himself. Such and such a man is a poor man; the plunderers came and took away everything that he had. But when all is gone, godliness teaches to make up all those losses in God. A godly man may enjoy the quintessence[25] of the same comfort as he had before, for a godly man does not live so much in himself as he lives in God. If anything is cut off from the stream, he knows how to go to the fountain and makes up all there. God is his all in all (1Co 15:28). [God is to us as] Elkanah said to Hannah, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (1Sa 1:8).

You know when a man has water coming to his house through several pipes, and he finds insufficient water comes into his wash-house, he will rather stop the other pipes that he may have all the water come in where he wants it. Perhaps, then, God had a stream of your affection running to Him when you enjoyed these things; yes, but a great deal was allowed to escape to the creature,[26] a great deal of your affections ran waste. Now the Lord would not have the affections of His children to run waste; therefore He has cut off your other pipes that your heart might flow wholly to Him.

If you have children, and because you let your servants perhaps feed them and give them things, you perceive that your servants are stealing away the hearts of your children, you would hardly be able to bear it; you would be ready to send away such a servant. When the servant is gone, the

child is at a great loss. It does not have the nurse. But the mother intends by sending her away, that the affections of the child might run more strongly towards herself. And what loss is it to the child that the affections that ran in a rough channel before towards the servant, run now towards the mother? So those affections that run towards the creature, God would have run towards Himself, that so He may be all in all to you here in this world.

13. A gracious heart gets contentment from the covenant promises that God has made with him.

He gets contentment from the *particular promises* that he has for supplying every particular want. There is no condition that a godly man or woman can be in, but there is some promise in the Scripture to help him in that condition.

When God makes a promise to His people, it must be with this reservation: God must have liberty for these three things—

i. Notwithstanding His promise, He will have liberty to make use of anything for your chastisement.

ii. He must have liberty to make use of your wealth, liberties, or lives for the furtherance of His own ends, if it is to be a stumbling block to wicked and ungodly men. He will not release the propriety that He has in your possessions and lives.

iii. God must have sufficient liberty to make use of what you have to show that His ways are unsearchable and His judgments past finding out (Rom 11:33).

Perhaps you have given your children something, but afterwards if you have a use for that thing, you will come and say, “I must have it.” “Why, Father?” the child may say, “You gave it to me.” “But I must have it,” says the father, “and I will make it up to you in some other way.” The child does not think that the father’s love is ever a whit[27] the less to him. So when there is any such promise as this, that God by His promise gives you His protection, and yet for all that such a thing befalls you, it is only as if the Father should say, “I gave you that indeed; but let Me have it, and I will make it up to you in some other way that shall be as good.”

The one who is filled with good things is just like many a man who enjoys an abundance of comforts in his own house. God grants him a pleasant home, a good wife, and fine walks and gardens. Now such a man

does not care much for going out. Other men are fain[28] to go out and see friends because they have quarrelling and contending at home. So a carnal man has little contentment in his own spirit.

As it is with a vessel that is full of liquor,[29] if you strike it, it will make no great noise; but if it is empty then it makes a great noise. So it is with the heart: a heart full of grace and goodness within will bear a great many strokes and never make any noise—but if an empty heart is struck, it *will* make a noise. When some men and women are complaining so much, it is a sign that there is emptiness in their hearts. If their hearts were filled with grace, they would not make such a noise. The disorders of men's hearts are great burdens to them, but many times a godly man has enough within to content him. Virtue is content with itself to live well. But how few are acquainted with this mystery! Many think, "O if I had what another man has, how happily and comfortably should I live!" But if you are a Christian, whatever your condition, you have enough within yourself.

I thought I would give you several promises for the contentment of the heart in the time of affliction. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa 43:2). 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 other, either literally or in some other way; for we find clearly that the promise that was made to Joshua, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Jos 1:5), is applied to Christians in the time of the Gospel (Heb 13).

The saints of God have an interest in all the promises that ever were made to our forefathers: from the beginning of the world, they are their inheritance and go on from one generation to another. By that, they come to have contentment because they inherit all the promises made in all the book of God. Hebrews 13:5 shows this plainly, and we do not inherit less now than they did in Joshua's time; but we inherit more, for you will find in that place of Hebrews that more is said than is to Joshua. To Joshua God says He will not leave him nor forsake him; but in this place in Hebrews in the Greek there are five negatives, as if God should say, "I will not leave you, no I will not, I will not, I will not," with such earnestness five times together. So that not only have we the same promises that they had, but we have them more enlarged and more full, though still not so much in the literal sense; for that, indeed, is the least part of the promise.

In Isaiah 54:17, God made a promise: That no weapon formed against His people should prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against them in judgment they shall condemn. Mark what follows, “This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.”

Therefore when you look into the book of God and find any promise there, you may make it your own; just as an heir who rides over a lot of fields and meadows says, “This meadow is my inheritance, and this corn field is my inheritance.” Then he sees a fine house, and says, “This fine house is my inheritance.” He looks at them with a different eye from a stranger who rides over those fields. A carnal heart reads the promises and reads them merely as stories, not that he has any great interest in them. But a godly man reads the Scriptures and says, “This is part of my inheritance: it is mine and I am to live upon it.” (See also Psa 34:10, 37:6; Isa 58:10.)

14. He has contentment by realizing the glorious things of heaven.

He has the heavenly glory that is to come, [and] by faith, he makes it present. 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 faint not,” says the Apostle. Why? Because these light afflictions that are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2Co 4:17). They see heaven before them and that contents them. When you sailors see the haven before you, though you were mightily troubled before you could see any land, yet when you come near the shore and can see a certain landmark, that contents you greatly. 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 contents himself. One drop of the sweetness of heaven is enough to take away all the sourness and bitterness of all the afflictions in the world. A carnal heart has no contentment 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.

3. How Christ Teaches Contentment

1. The lesson of self-denial

Self-denial is a hard lesson. Bradford,[30] the martyr, said, "Whoever has not learned the lesson of the Cross has not learned his A-B-C in Christianity." This is the first lesson that Christ teaches any soul: self-denial, which brings contentment, which brings down and softens a man's heart. You know how when you strike something soft it makes no noise; but if you strike a hard thing, it makes a noise. So with the hearts of men who are full of themselves and hardened with self-love—if they receive a stroke they make a noise, but a self-denying Christian yields to God's hand and makes no noise. When you strike a woolsack,[31] 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 I will show you how Christ teaches self-denial and how that brings contentment.

a. *Such a person learns to know that he* is *nothing*. He comes to this, to be able to say, "Well, I see I am nothing in myself." That man or woman who indeed knows that he or she is nothing, and has learned it thoroughly, will be able to bear anything. God says to us, "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not" (Pro 23:5), speaking of riches. God would not have us set our hearts upon riches because they are nothing; yet God is pleased to set His heart upon us, and we are nothing. That is God's grace, free grace. Therefore, it does not much matter what I suffer, for I am as nothing.

b. *I deserve nothing*. I am nothing, and I deserve nothing. Suppose I lack this and that thing that others have? I am sure that I deserve nothing except it be hell. You will answer any of your servants who are not content, "I wonder what you think you deserve?" Or your children, "Do you deserve it that you are so eager to have it?" You would stop their mouths thus, and so we may easily stop our own mouths—we deserve nothing, and therefore why should we be impatient if we do not get what we desire. If we had deserved anything, we might be troubled—as in the case of a man who has deserved well of the state or of his friends, yet does not receive a suitable reward, it troubles him greatly. Whereas if he is conscious that he has deserved nothing, he is content with a rebuff !

c. *I can do nothing*. Christ says, “Without me you can do nothing” (Joh 15:5). Do but consider of what use you are in the world, and if you consider what little need God has of you, you will not be much discontented. Though God cuts you short of certain comforts, yet you will say, “Since I do but little, why should I have much?”

d. *I am so vile that of myself I cannot receive any good*. I am not only an empty vessel, but a corrupt and unclean vessel.

e. *If God cleanses us in some measure, yet we can make use of nothing when we have it*, if God but withdraws Himself.

f. *We are worse than nothing*. By sin, we become a great deal worse than nothing and contrary to all good. This is a great deal worse than merely to have an emptiness of all that is good. We are not empty pitchers in respect of good, but we are like pitchers filled with poison—and is it much for such as we are to be cut short of outward comforts?

g. *If we perish, we will be no loss*. Christ teaches the soul this. A man who is little in his own eyes will account every affliction as little and every mercy as great. Consider Saul: There was a time when he was little in his own eyes, and then his afflictions were but little to him (1Sa 9:21). When some would not have had him to be king, but spoke contemptuously of him, he held his peace; but when Saul began to be big in his own eyes, then afflictions began to be great to him.

There was never any man or woman so contented as a self-denying man or woman. No one ever denied himself as much as Jesus Christ did. He gave His cheeks to the smiters; He opened not His mouth; He was as a lamb when He was led to the slaughter; He made no noise in the street. He denied Himself above all and was willing to empty Himself—and so He was the most contented that ever any was in the world (Isa 50:6, 53:7-10; Mat 16:24; Phi 2:6-11). And the nearer we come to learning to deny ourselves as Christ did, the more contented shall we be.

Whatever the Lord shall lay upon us, He is righteous, for He has to deal with a most wretched creature. A discontented heart is troubled because he has no more comfort, but a self-denying man rather wonders that *he has as much as he has*. “Oh,” says the one, “I have but a little.” “Aye,”[32] says the man who has learned this lesson of self-denial, “but I rather wonder that God bestows upon me the liberty of breathing in the air, knowing how vile I am and knowing how much sin the Lord sees in me.”

h. But there is a further thing in self-denial that brings contentment: *thereby the soul comes to rejoice and take satisfaction in all God's ways*. I beseech you to notice this! If a man is selfish and self-love prevails in his heart, he will be glad of those things that suit with his own ends. But a godly man who has denied himself will be glad of all things that shall suit with God's ends. A gracious heart says, "God's ends are my ends—and I have denied my own ends." So his comforts are multiplied, whereas the comforts of other men are single. It is very rare that God's way shall suit with a man's particular end, but always God's ways suit with His own ends. If you will only have contentment when God's ways suit with your own ends, you can have it only now and then; but a self-denying man denies his own ends and only looks at the ends of God, and therein he is contented [always]!

When a man is selfish he cannot 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[33] me, and I cannot have room in those narrow ends of my own. You know in the City [of London] what a great deal of stir there is in narrow streets—since Thames street is so narrow, they jostle and wrangle and fight one with another—but in the broad streets they can go quietly. Similarly, men who are selfish meet and so jostle with one another: one man is for self in one thing, another man is for self 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 have room to walk and never jostle with one another as others do.

2. *The vanity of the creature*

Whatever there is in the creature has emptiness in it. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Ecc 1:2) is the lesson that the wise man learned: the creature in itself can do us neither good nor hurt; it is all but as wind. There is nothing in the creature that is suitable for a gracious heart to feed upon for its good and happiness. My brethren, the reason why you do not have contentment in the things of the world is *not* that you do not have enough of them. The reason is that they are not things proportional to that immortal soul of yours that is capable of God Himself.

3. *The one thing necessary*

Christ teaches a Christian what the one thing necessary is. “Thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful” (Luk 10:41-42). Before, the soul sought after this and that. But now it says, “I see that it is not necessary for me to be rich, but it is necessary for me to make my peace with God. It is not necessary that I should live a pleasurable life in this world, but it is absolutely necessary that I should have pardon of my sin. It is not necessary that I should have honor and preferment, but it is necessary that I should have God as my portion and have my part in Jesus Christ. It is necessary that my soul should be saved in the Day of Jesus Christ! The other things are pretty fine indeed, and I should be glad if God would give me them: a fine house, income, clothes, and advancement for my wife and children. These are comfortable things, but they are not the *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”—thus Christ instructs the soul.

Many of you have had some thoughts 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 off from all other things in the world.

It is said that when Pompey[34] was carrying corn to Rome at a time of dearth,[35] he was in a great deal of danger from storms at sea. But he said, “We must go on; it is necessary that Rome should be relieved, but it is not necessary that we should live.” So, certainly, when the soul is once taken up with the things that are of absolute necessity, it will not be much troubled about other things. 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 the weighty things of eternity, the things of here below that disquieted it before are things now of no consequence to him in comparison with the other. How things fall out here is not much regarded by him, if the one thing necessary is provided for.

4. The soul comes to understand its relation to the world.

By this I mean God comes to instruct the soul effectually through Christ by His Spirit on what terms it lives here in the world. While I live in the world, my condition is to be but a pilgrim, a stranger, a traveler, and a soldier (Heb 11:13; 1Pe 2:11; 2Ti 2:3-4). Now rightly to understand this—not only being taught it by rote so that I can speak the words over, but when my soul is 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 a pilgrim who is traveling to another home, and that I am here a soldier in my warfare—a right understanding of this is a mighty help to contentment in whatever befalls one.

Thus, it should be with us in this world; for the truth is, we are all in this world but as *seafaring men*, tossed up and down on the waves of the sea of this world, and our haven is heaven. Here we are *traveling*, and our home is a distant home in another world. Though we meet with travelers' fare sometimes, yet it should not be grievous to us. The Scripture tells us plainly that we must behave ourselves here as *pilgrims* and *strangers*: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1Pe 2:11).

Consider your condition: you are *pilgrims and strangers*—so do not think to satisfy yourselves here. When a man comes into an inn and sees there a fair cupboard of plate, he is not troubled that it is not his own. Why? Because he is going away. So let us not be troubled when we see that other men have great wealth, but we have not. Why? Because *we* are going away to another country. You are, as it were, only lodging here for a night. If you were to live a hundred years, it is not as much as a night in comparison to eternity. It is as though you were traveling and had come to an inn: what madness is it for a man to be discontented because he has not got what he sees there, seeing he may be going away again within less than a quarter of an hour! You find the same in David: this was the argument that took David's heart away from the things of this world and set him on other things: "I am a stranger in the earth: hide not thy commandments from me" (Psa 119:19). "I am a stranger in the earth"—what then?—"then, Lord, let me have the knowledge of your commandments, and it is sufficient. As for the things of the earth, I do not set store by them, whether I have much or little; but hide not Thy commandments from me, Lord! Let me know the rule that I should guide my life by."

Then again, we are not only travelers but *soldiers* also. Therefore, we ought to behave ourselves accordingly. The Apostle makes use of this argument in writing to Timothy: “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2Ti 2:3). The very thought of the condition of a soldier is enough to still his disquiet of heart. When he is away, he does not enjoy such comforts in his quarters as he has in his own home. Perhaps a man who had his bed and curtains drawn about him and all comforts in his chamber has now sometimes to lie on straw. He thinks to himself, “I am a soldier and it is suitable to my condition.” He must have his bed warmed at home, but he must lie out in the fields when he is a soldier; and the very thought of the condition in which he stands, calms him in all things. Yes, and he goes rejoicing to think that this is only suitable to the condition in which God has put him. So it should be with us in respect of this world. What an unseemly thing it would be to see a soldier go whining up and down with his finger in his eye,[36] complaining that he does not have hot meat every meal and his bed warmed as he did at home! Now Christians know that they are in their warfare: they are here in this world fighting and combating with the enemies of their souls and their eternal welfare, and they must be willing to endure hardness here. A right understanding of the fact that God has put them into such a condition is what will make them content, especially when they consider that they are certain of the victory and that ere long they shall triumph with Jesus Christ. Then all their sorrows shall be done away, and their tears wiped from their eyes. A soldier is content to endure hardness though he does not know that he shall have the victory; but a Christian knows himself to be a soldier and knows [also] that he shall conquer and triumph with Jesus Christ to all eternity!

5. Christ teaches us wherein consists any good that is to be enjoyed in any creature in the world.

If there is any good in wealth or in any comfort in this world, it is not so much that it pleases my sense or that it suits my body, but that it has reference to God, the first Being—that by these creatures somewhat of God’s goodness might be conveyed to me.

Would you account yourselves to be honored by your servants, if when you set them about a work that has some excellence, they will go on and on, and you cannot get them off from it? However good the work may be, yet if

you call them to another work, you expect them to manifest enough respect to you as to be content to come off from that, though they are set about a lesser work, if it is more useful to your ends. In the same way, you were in a prosperous estate, and there God was calling you to some service that you took pleasure in. But suppose God said, “I will use you in a suffering condition, and I will have you to honor Me in that way”? This is how you honor God: that you can turn this way or that way as God calls you to it.

6. Christ teaches the souls whom He brings into this school in the knowledge of their own hearts.

a. By studying your heart, you will come soon to discover *wherein your discontent lies*: it lies in some corruption and disorder of the heart. It is similar to the case of a little child who is very awkward in the house, and when a stranger comes in, he does not know what the matter is. But when the nurse comes, she knows the temper and disposition of the child and therefore knows how to calm it. It is just the same here: when we are strangers to our own hearts, we are powerfully discontented and do not know how to quiet ourselves because we do not know wherein the disquiet lies. But if we are very well versed in our own hearts, when anything happens to unsettle us, we soon find out the cause of it and so quickly become quiet.

b. This knowledge of our hearts will help us to contentment because by it we shall come to know *what best suits our condition*. When a poor countryman takes medicine, the medicine works; but he thinks it will kill him because he does not know the bad humors that are in his body, and therefore he does not understand how suitable the medicine is for him. But if a doctor takes a purge, and it makes him extremely sick, “I like this the better” he says, “it is only working on the humor that I know is the cause of my disease”—and because of that such a man, who has knowledge and understanding of his body and the cause of his disorder, is not troubled or disturbed.

c. By knowing their own hearts, they know *what they are able to manage*. By this means, they come to be content. Countrymen observe that if they overstock their land, it will quickly spoil them. So a wise husbandman who knows how much his ground will bear is not troubled that he has not as much stock as others. Why? Because he knows he does not

have enough ground for as great a stock, and that quiets him. Many who do not know their own hearts would fain have as prosperous a position as others have; but if they knew their own hearts, they would know that they were not able to manage it. So certainly would we say, if we knew our own hearts, that such and such a condition is better for me than if it had been otherwise.

7. The seventh lesson by which Christ teaches contentment is the burden of a prosperous outward condition.

One never attains to any great skill in contentment until he comes to understand the burden that is in a prosperous condition.

a. There is a burden of *trouble*. A rose has its prickles, and the Scripture says that he that will be rich pierceth himself through with many sorrows (1Ti 6:10). He looks upon the delight and glory of riches that appears outwardly, but he does not consider what piercing sorrows he may meet with in them. 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 certain men are happy, but they may have many troubles that you little think of.

b. There is a burden of *danger* in it. Men in a prosperous position are in a great deal of danger. They are subject to many temptations that other men are not subject to. You know when a ship has all its sails up in a storm —even the top sail—it is in more danger than one that has all its sails drawn in. Similarly, men who have their top sail and all up so finely are more likely to be drowned in perdition than other men.

We have a striking example of this in the children of Kohath: you will find that they were in a more excellent position than the other Levites. “This shall be the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation, about the most holy things” (Num 4:4). Mark this, the Levites were exercised about holy things; but the service of the sons of Kohath was about the *most* holy things of all. But notice the burden that comes with their honor: “And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service: And four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto

the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none: because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders" (Num 7:6-9). Mark, the other Levites had oxen and wagons given to them to make their service easier, but to the sons of Kohath he gave none! That is the reason why God was so displeased: they wanted more ease in God's service than God would have for them. And indeed, those who are in a more honorable place have a burden to carry on their shoulders—those who are under them do not think of it [because] they have ways of easing their [own] burden. A poor man who is in a low condition thinks, "I am low and others are raised, but I know now what their burden is," and so, if he is rightly instructed in the school of Christ, he comes to be contented.

c. In a prosperous condition, there is the burden of *duty*. You look only at the sweetness and comfort, the honor and respect that 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 (Luk 12:48).

d. The last is the burden of *account* in a prosperous condition. Those who enjoy great wealth and a prosperous condition have a great account to give to God (1Co 4:2).

8. Christ teaches them what a great and dreadful evil it is to be given up to one's heart's desires.

Spiritual judgments are more fearful than any outward judgments. Now once the soul understands these things, a man will be content when God crosses him in his desires. Is it your only misery that you are crossed in your desires? 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 Psalm 81:11-12: "But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me"—what then? —"So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels."

Spiritual judgments are the greatest judgments of all. The Lord lays such and such an affliction upon my outward wealth, but what if He had taken away my life? A man's health is a greater mercy than his wealth, and you poor people should consider that. Is the health of a man's body better

than his wealth? What then is the health of a man's soul?—that is a great deal better. The Lord has inflicted external judgments, but He has not inflicted spiritual judgments on you; He has not given you up to hardness of heart and taken away the spirit of prayer from you in your afflicted condition. Oh, then, be of good comfort! Though you have outward afflictions upon you, your soul—your more excellent part—is not afflicted. Perhaps one of a man's children has the fit of a toothache, but his next-door neighbor has the plague, or all his children have died of it! Now, shall he be so discontented that his children have toothache when his neighbor's children are dead? Think thus: "Lord, you have laid an afflicted condition upon me; but, Lord, you have not given me the plague of a hard heart."

9. Right knowledge of God's providence[37]

Christ teaches this art of contentment through the right knowledge of God's providence.

a. In the right knowledge of God's providence are four things.

1. The *universality* of providence, that is, how the providence of God goes through the whole world and extends itself to everything (Rev 19:6). Not only that God by His providence rules the world and governs all things in general, but that it reaches to every detail; not only to order the great affairs of kingdoms, but it reaches to every man's family. It reaches to every person in the family. It reaches to every condition; yea, to every happening, to everything that falls out concerning you in every particular. Not one hair falls from your head, not a sparrow to the ground, without the providence of God (Mat 10:29-30). Nothing befalls you, good or evil, but there is a providence of the infinite eternal first Being in that thing.

2. The *efficacy* [38] that is in providence. Suppose we are discontented, vexed, and troubled, and we fret and rage; yet we need not think we will alter the course of providence by our discontent. Some of Job's friends, when they saw that he was impatient, said to him: "Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his 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 such a weak thing that, because it does not please you, it must alter its course?" Whether or not you are content, the providence of God will go on. It has an efficacy of power, of virtue, to carry all things before it. Can you make one

hair black or white with all the stir that you are making? When you are in a ship at sea that has all its 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 can you make the providence of God alter and change its course with your vexing and fretting. It will go on with power, do what you can.

3. The infinite *variety* of the works of providence, and yet the order of things, one working towards another. We put these two things together, for God in His providence causes a thousand thousand things to depend one upon another. We indeed look at things by pieces: we look at one detail and do not 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. When a child looks at a clock, it looks first at one wheel, and then at another wheel; he does not look at them all together or the dependence that one has upon another. But the workman has his eyes on them all together and sees the dependence of all, one upon another. So it is in God's providence.

Now notice how this works to contentment: when a certain passage of providence befalls me, that is one wheel; it may be that if this wheel were stopped, a thousand other things might come to be stopped by this. In a clock, stop but one wheel and you stop every wheel because they are dependent upon one another. So when God has ordered a thing for the present to be thus and thus, how do you know how many [other] things depend upon this thing? God may have some work to do twenty years hence that depends on this passage of providence that falls out this day or this week.

Let me therefore be quiet and content. For though I am crossed in some one particular thing, God attains His end—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; and how do I know what God is about to do, and how many things depend upon this providence?" If you have a love and friendship to God, be willing to be crossed in a few things that the Lord may have His work go on in general in a thousand other things.

4. Christ teaches them the *knowledge of God's usual way in His dealings with His people more particularly*. There is the knowledge of God in His providence in general. But the right understanding of the *particular* way of God in His providence towards His people and saints is a notable lesson to help us in the art of contentment. If we once get to know a man's

way and course, we may better suit and be content to live with him than before we came to know his way and course. When we come to live in a society with men and women, they may be good; but until we come to know their way, course, and disposition, many things may cross us, and we think they are very hard. But when we come to be acquainted with their way and spirits, then we can suit with them very well. The reason of our trouble is that we do not understand their way. So it is with you: those who are but as strangers to God and do not understand the way of God are troubled with the providences of God. They think them very strange and cannot tell what to make of them because they do not understand the ordinary course and way of God towards His people. Sometimes if a stranger comes into a family and sees certain things done, he wonders what the matter is; but those who are acquainted with it are not at all troubled by it. So it is when we first come to understand God's ways.

b. In God's ways, there are three things.

When we get to know them, we shall not wonder so much at the providence of God, but be contented with them.

1. *God's ordinary course is that His people in this world should be in an afflicted condition*. God has revealed in His Word that His people here should be in an afflicted condition. Now, men who do not understand this wonder to hear that the people of God are afflicted and their enemies prosper in their way. When those who seek God in His way are afflicted, wounded, and spoiled, and their enemies prevail, they wonder at it. But one who is in the school of Christ is taught that God brings up His people in this world in an afflicted condition. Therefore, the Apostle says, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial" (1Pe 4:12). We are not therefore to be dis-contented with it, seeing God has set such a course and way; and we know it is the will of God that it should be so.

2. *Usually when God intends the greatest mercy to any of His people, He brings them into the lowest condition.* God seems to go quite across and work in a contrary way. God dealt this way with His Son; Christ Himself went into glory by suffering (Heb 2:10). And if God so deals with His own Son, much more with His people. A little before daybreak, you will observe it is darker than it was any time before; so God will make our conditions a little darker before the mercy comes.

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 evil into the greatest good is another; and yet that is God's way. The greatest good that God intends for His people, He many times works out of the greatest evil. The greatest light is brought out of the greatest darkness. Luther 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."[39] God brings joy out of sorrow, and He brings prosperity out of adversity—yea, and many times brings grace out of sin, that is, makes use of sin[40] to work furtherance of grace. It is the way of God to bring all good out of evil, not only to overcome the evil, but to make the evil work toward the good (Rom 8:28-29).

4. The Excellence of Contentment

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." —*Philippians 4:11*

There is indeed a great deal of excellence in contentment. The Apostle says, "I have learned," as if he should say, "Blessed be God that I have learned this lesson! I find so much good in this contentment that I would not for a world be without it."

1. By contentment, we come to give God the worship that is His due.

You worship God more by this than when you come to hear a sermon or spend an hour in prayer. These are acts of God's worship, but they are only external acts of worship. But this is the soul's worship: *to subject itself thus to God*. You who often will worship God by hearing and praying, and yet afterwards will be froward[41] and discontented—know that God does not regard such worship; He will [rather] have the soul's worship, the subjecting of the soul unto God.

Note this: In active obedience, we worship God by *doing what pleases God*; but by passive obedience, we do as well worship God by *being pleased with what God does*. "I labor to do what pleases God, and I labor that what God does shall please me"—here is a Christian indeed who shall endeavor both these.

2. In contentment, there is much exercise of grace.

a. Much *exercise of grace*. There is a compound of grace in contentment: there is faith and humility, love and patience, wisdom and hope. It is an oil that has the ingredients of every kind of grace. 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.

b. There is a great deal of *strength of grace* in contentment. It argues a great deal of strength in the body for it to be able to endure hard weather and whatever comes, and yet not to be much altered by it; so it argues

strength of grace to be content. You who complain of weakness of memory, of weakness of gifts, you cannot do what others do in other things—but have you this gracious heart of contentment? It is an argument of a gracious magnitude of spirit that whatsoever befalls it, yet it is not always whining and complaining as others do, but keeps in a constant tenor[42] whatever befalls it. Such things as cause others to be fretted[43] and take away all the comfort of their lives make no alteration at all in the spirits of these men and women.

c. It is also an argument of a great deal of *beauty of grace*. The glory of God appears here more than in any of His works. There is no work 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 was what convinced the king: he saw that the three children could walk in the midst of the fiery furnace and not be touched (Dan 3:25). By this, the king was mightily convinced that surely their God was the great God indeed. So when a Christian can walk in the midst of fiery trials without his garments being singed and has comfort and joy in the midst of everything—when like Paul in the stocks he can sing, which wrought upon the jailor (Act 16:25-34)—it will convince men, when they see the power of grace in the midst of afflictions. When they can behave themselves in a gracious and holy manner in such afflictions as would make others roar, this is the glory of a Christian!

3. Those who are contented are fitted to receive mercy.

If you want a vessel to take in any liquid, you must hold it still; for if the vessel stirs and shakes up and down, you cannot pour anything in. You will say, “Hold still,” that you may pour it in and not lose any. So if we would be vessels to receive God’s mercy and would have the Lord pour His mercy into us, we must have quiet, still hearts. We must not have hearts hurrying up and down in trouble, discontent, and vexing, but still and quiet. If a child throws and kicks up and down for a thing, you do not give it [to] him when he cries so, but first you will have the child quiet. Even though you intend him to have what he cries for, you will not give it [to] him until he is quiet, comes and stands still before you, and is contented without it;

then you will give it him. Truly, so does the Lord deal with us; for our dealings with Him are just as your froward children are with you.

4. Contentment makes fit to do service.

As the philosophers say of everything that moves, nothing moves [except] it has something immovable that upholds it. The wheels in a coach move up and down, but the axletree[44] does not move up and down. So it is with the heart of a man: if he will move to do service to God, he must have a steady heart within him. Those who have unsteady, disturbed spirits are not fit to do service for God. That is the reason why, when the Lord has any great work for one of His servants to do, usually He first quiets their spirits.

5. Contentment delivers us from an abundance of temptations.

Where the devil sees the spirits of men and women troubled and vexed, he says, "There is good fishing for me." "Will you suffer such a thing?" he says, "Take this indirect way. Do you not see how poor you are, [while] others are well off? You do not know what to do for the winter to provide fuel and get bread for you and your children," and so he tempts them to unlawful courses. The rise of it has been their discontent.

Therefore, it is noticeable that those upon whom the devil works are usually those of the poorer sort who are discontented at home. Their neighbors trouble and vex them, their spirits are weak, and they cannot bear it; so upon that the devil fastens his temptations and draws them to anything. If they are poor, then he promises them money; if they have revengeful spirits, then he tells them that he will revenge them upon such and such persons—now this quiets and contents them. Oh! There is occasion of temptation for the devil when he meets with a discontented spirit! Now God does not dwell in spirits that are in confusion, but He dwells in peaceable and quiet spirits.

Oh, in such times as these, when men are in danger of the loss of their wealth, men who do not have this grace are in a most lamentable condition. They are in more danger for their souls than they are for their outward possessions. You think it is a sad thing to be in danger of your outward

possessions, that you may lose everything in a night; but if you have not 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 thus, that they must live as finely as they were wont[45] to do, they make themselves prey to the devil. But for such as 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.

6. Contentment will bring abundant comforts in a man’s life.

Contentment will make a man’s life exceedingly sweet and comfortable. a) What a man has, he has in a kind of independent way, not depending upon any creature for his comfort. b) If God raises the position of a contented man who is low, he has the love of God in it. It is abundantly sweeter then, than if he had it and his heart was not contented; for God may grant a discontented man his desire, but he cannot say that it is from 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.

7. Contentment draws comfort from those things we do not possess.

You will find a noteworthy story in Plutarch[46] to illustrate this. In the life of Pyrrhus,[47] one Sineus came to him and would fain have had him not war with the Romans. He said to him, “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 shall we have of that victory?” Pyrrhus answered him, “We shall then straightway conquer all the rest of Italy with ease.” “Indeed, that is likely which your Grace speaks,” said Sineus, “but when we have won Italy, will our wars end then?” “If the gods were pleased,” said Pyrrhus, “that the victory were achieved, the way would then be made open for us to attain great conquests, for who would not afterwards go into Africa and so to Carthage?” “But,” said Sineus, “when we have everything in our hands, what shall we do in the end?” Then

Pyrrhus laughing told him again, “We will then be quiet, take our ease, have feasts every day, and be as merry with one another as we possibly can.” Said Sineus, “What prevents us now from being as quiet and merry together, since we enjoy that immediately without further travel and trouble that we would seek for abroad with such shedding of blood and manifest danger? Can you not sit down and be merry now?” So a man may think, “If I had such a thing, then I would have another; and if I had that, then I should have more!” And what if you had all you desire? Then you would be content? Why, you may be content now without them!

Certainly our contentment does not consist in getting the thing we desire, but in God’s fashioning our spirits to our conditions. So, a man by this art of contentment may live better without an estate than another man can live off an estate.

There is more comfort in the grace of contentment than there is even in any possessions whatsoever. A man has more comfort in being content without a thing than he can have in the thing that he in a discontented way desires. You think, “If I had such a thing, *then* I should be content. But if I had it, then it would be but the creature that helped my contentment, whereas now it is the grace of God in my soul that makes me content. Surely, it is better to be content with the grace of God in my soul, than with enjoying an outward comfort.”

If I become content by having my desire satisfied, that is only self-love; but when I am contented with the hand of God and am willing to be at His disposal, that comes from my love to God.

If I am contented because I have what I desire, perhaps I am contented in that one thing; but that one thing does not furnish me with contentment in another thing—perhaps I may grow more dainty, nice, and froward[48] in other things. If you give children what they want in some things, they grow so much the more coy[49] and dainty and discontented if they cannot have other things that they want. But if I have once overcome my heart and am contented through the grace of God in my heart, then this makes me content not only in one particular, but in general—whatever befalls me. I am discontented and would fain have a certain thing 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 am prepared to be contented in all conditions. Thus, you see that contentment brings comfort to a man’s life

[and] fills it full of comfort in this world; the truth is, it is even *a heaven on earth*.

Therefore, be contented, prize this contentment, and be willing to live in this world as long as God shall please. Do not think, “Oh, that I were delivered from all these afflictions and troubles here in this world!” If you were, then you would have more ease yourself; but this is a way of honoring God and manifesting the excellence of grace here, when you are in this conflict of temptation, which God shall not have from you in heaven. So be satisfied and quiet: be contented with your contentment. “I lack certain things that others have; but blessed be God, I have a contented heart that others have not!”—[in this,] the Lord has granted you a rich portion.

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

There is God’s blessing upon those who are content and upon all that they have. We read in Deuteronomy of the blessing of Judah, the principal tribe: “And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies” (Deu 33:7). “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 is the blessing of Judah. So when God gives you a sufficiency of your own, as every contented man has, that is the blessing of God upon you.

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

God will give them the good of all the things that they are contented to be without. There is such and such a mercy that you think would be very pleasant if you had it; but can you bring your heart to submit to God [without] it? Then you shall have the blessing of the mercy one way or another. If you do not have the thing itself, you shall have it made up one way or another. You will have a bill of exchange to receive something in lieu of [50] it. There is no comfort that any soul is content to be without, but the Lord will give either the comfort or something instead of it.

Now [let us] draw an argument from active obedience to passive: there is as 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. Therefore, consider, “How many things have I that others lack? Can I bring my heart into a quiet, contented frame to *lack* what others *have*? [If so,] I have the blessing of all that they have, and I shall either possess such things as others have, or else God will make it up one way or another, either here or hereafter in eternity to me.” Oh, with contentment you have all kinds of riches!

10. The soul comes to an excellence near to God Himself.

Yea, the nearest possible, for this word translated “content” signifies a self-sufficiency. A contented man is a self-sufficient man; and what is the great glory of God, but to be happy and self-sufficient in Himself? *El-shaddai* means “God having sufficiency in Himself ” (Gen 17:1, 35:11), and you come near to this. As you partake of the divine nature by grace in general, so you do it in a more peculiar manner by this grace of Christian contentment, for what is the excellence and glory of God but this?

Part Two: Murmuring

5. The Evils of a Murmuring Spirit

Thus, we have showed in many respects the excellence 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 that this grace may be in you that you may honor God and honor your profession with this grace of contentment.

Now, that we may come to grips with the practice, it is necessary that we should be humbled in our hearts because of our lack of contentment in the past. For there is no way to set about any duty that you should perform, but first you must be humbled for the lack of it. “Oh, how far I have been from this grace of contentment that 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. Oh, the boisterousness[51] of my spirit! What evil God sees in the vexing and fretting of my heart and murmuring and repining of my spirit!” Oh, that God would make you see it!

1. The great evil that is in a murmuring, discontented heart

This murmuring and discontentedness of yours reveals much corruption in the soul. As contentment argues much grace, strong grace, and beautiful grace, so murmuring argues much corruption, strong corruption, and very vile corruptions in your heart. If a man’s body is of such a temper that every scratch of a pin makes his flesh to rankle[52] and be a sore, you will surely say this man’s body is very corrupt. So it is in your spirit, if every little trouble and affliction makes you discontented and murmur, and even causes your spirit within you to rankle.

When an unskilled man comes and sees a large gash in the flesh, he looks upon it as dangerous; but when a surgeon comes and sees a great gash, he says, “This will be healed within a few days, but there is a smaller wound and an inflammation in it; this will cost time to cure.” So he does not lay healing salves upon the gash, but his great care is to get out the septic inflammation. The thing that must heal this wound is some potion to purge. But the patient says, “What good will this do to my gash? You give me something to drink, but my gash is in my arm or in my leg. What good will this do that I am putting in my stomach?” Yes, it purges out the infection and takes away the inflammation; until that is taken away, the salves can do no good.

So it is, just for all the world, in the souls of men: it may be that there is some affliction upon them, which I compare to the gash. Now they think that the greatness of the affliction is what makes their condition most miserable. Oh now, there is an inflammation in the heart, a murmuring spirit that is within you, and that is the misery of your condition. It must be purged out of you before you can be healed. A murmuring heart is a very sinful heart! So when you are troubled for this affliction, you need rather to turn your thoughts to be troubled for the murmuring of your heart; for that is the greatest trouble. There is an affliction upon you and that is grievous; but there is a murmuring heart within, and that is more grievous!

2. When God would show the brand of a wicked man, He instances the sin of murmuring in a more special manner.

I might name many Scriptures, but that Scripture in Jude 1:14-15 is a most remarkable one: “The Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are *ungodly* among them of all their *ungodly* deeds which they have *ungodly* committed, and of all their hard speeches which *ungodly* sinners have spoken against him.” Mark, here mention is made four times of ungodly ones. This is in general, but now he comes in particular to show who these are: “These are *murmurers*”—that is the very first. Would you know who ungodly men are, whom God when He comes with ten thousands of angels shall come to

punish for all their ungodly deeds that they do? These ungodly ones are *murmurers*!

This murmuring, which is the vice contrary to contentment, is not as small a matter as you think. You think you are not as ungodly as others are because you do not swear and drink as others do, but you may be ungodly in murmuring. It is true there is no sin but some seeds and remainders of it are in those who are godly; but when men are under the power of this sin of murmuring, it convicts them as ungodly, as well as if they were under the power of any other sin. This one Scripture should make the heart shake at the thought of the sin of murmuring.

3. God accounts murmuring as rebellion.

A murmuring heart is a rebellious heart, as you will find if you compare two Scriptures together: "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD" (Num 16:41)—they all murmured! Now compare this with 17:10: "And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels." So you see that to be a murmurer and a rebel in Scripture phrase is all one; it is *rebellion against God*. Just as when the people are discontented, it is the beginning of rebellion and sedition[53] in a kingdom. When discontent comes, it grows to murmuring. Before open rebellion in a kingdom, there is first a smoke of murmuring, and then it breaks forth into the open [fire of] rebellion. But because it has the seeds of rebellion, it is accounted before the Lord *to be rebellion*. Will you be a rebel against God? When you feel your heart discontented and murmuring against the dispensation of God towards you, you should check it thus: "Oh, you wretched heart! What!—will you rise in rebellion against the infinite God?" Yet you have done so! Charge your heart with this sin of rebellion. You who are guilty of this sin of murmuring are this day charged by the Lord as being guilty of rebellion against Him. God expects that when you go home, you should humble your souls before Him for this sin.

4. Murmuring is contrary to the work of God in salvation.

It is a wickedness that is greatly contrary to grace, and especially contrary to the work of God in the conversion of a sinner.

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 to see and be sensible of the dreadful evil that is in sin and the great breach that sin has made between God and 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? How can I be then so much troubled for every little affliction? Certainly, if I were burdened with the evil of sin, it would swallow up all other burdens.

ANSWER 2: Am I the soul to whom the Lord has revealed the infinite excellence of Jesus Christ, and yet shall I think such a little affliction to be so grievous to me, when I have had the sight of such glory in Christ as is worth more than ten thousand worlds? But has God given you that, and will you be discontented for a trifle[54] in comparison to that?

ANSWER 3: A third work when God brings the soul home to Himself is by taking the heart off from the creature, disengaging the heart from all creature comforts. The soul that before was seeking for contentment in the world and cleaving to the creature is now called out in the world by the Lord, Who 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 the things that are here below in the world.” How contrary is a murmuring heart to such a thing! Something that is glued to another cannot be taken off, [except] you tear it; so it is a sign your heart is glued to the world, that when God would take you off, your heart tears. If God, by an affliction, should come to take anything in the world from you, and you can part from it with ease, without tearing, it is a sign then that your heart is not glued to the world.

ANSWER 4: A fourth work of God in converting a sinner is this: the casting of the soul upon Jesus Christ for all its good. Has God converted you and drawn you to His Son to cast your soul upon Him for all your good, and yet you are discontented for the want of some little matter in a creature comfort? As He says in another case, “Where is your faith?” (Luk 8:25).

ANSWER 5: The soul is subdued to God, and then it comes to receive Jesus Christ as King—to rule, order, and dispose of him how He pleases. Now, how opposite is a murmuring, discontented heart to a heart subdued to

Jesus Christ as King and receiving Him as a Lord to rule and dispose of him as He pleases!

ANSWER 6: In the work of conversion, there is the resignation of the soul wholly to God. Have you ever surrendered up yourself to God in an everlasting covenant? Then, certainly, this fretting, murmuring heart of yours is strongly opposite to it.

5. Murmuring and discontent is exceedingly below a Christian.

Oh, it is too mean and base[55] a disorder for a Christian to give place to it. Now it is below a Christian in many respects.

a. Murmuring is below the relation in which you stand as a Christian.

"Below what relation?" you will say.

i. *The relation in which you stand to God.* Do you not call God your Father? Do you not stand in relation to Him as a child? What!—do you murmur? In 2 Samuel 13:4 there is a speech of Jonadab to Amnon: "Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day?" He perceived that his spirit was troubled, for otherwise he was of a fat and plump temper of body. So I may say to a Christian, "Are you the son of the King of heaven, and yet so disquieted, troubled, and vexed at every little thing that happens?" As if a King's son were to cry out that he is undone for losing a toy; what an unworthy thing this would be! *So do you*: you cry out as if you were undone and yet are a King's son! You dishonor your Father in this, as if He had not wisdom, power, or mercy enough to provide for you.

ii. *The relation in which you stand to Jesus Christ.* You are the spouse of Christ. What!—one married to Jesus Christ and yet troubled and discontented? Have you not enough in Him? Elkanah said to Hannah: "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (1Sa 1:8); so does not Christ your Husband say to you, "Am not I better to you than thousands of riches and comforts, such comforts as you murmur for want of?" Has not 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 such as to give you His Son in marriage (Rev 21:9-10)? Why are you discontented and murmuring? It is a dishonor for a husband to have the wife to whining up and down. What!—you are matched with Christ and are His spouse: will you murmur now and be

discontented in your spirit? You will observe that with those who are newly married, when there is discontent between the wife and the husband, their friends will shake their heads and say, “They are not meeting with what they expected. Ever since they were married they are not so cheery as they used to be. Surely it is likely to prove an ill match.” But it is not so here; it shall not be so between you and Christ. Oh, Jesus Christ does not love to see His spouse with a scowling countenance!

b. Murmuring is below the high dignity that God has put upon you.

Do but consider the high dignity that God has put upon you: the meanest[56] Christian in the world is a lord of heaven and earth. That is, as Christ is Lord of all, so He has made those who are His members lords of all. “The world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come,” says the Apostle, “all are yours” (1Co 3:22). Death is yours, that is, you are lords over it, as it were. Even death itself, your greatest enemy, is turned to be your slave. You were as a firebrand of hell and might have been roaring there to all eternity, yet God raised you to have a higher excellence in you than there is in all the works of creation that ever He made!

And the death of Christ is yours. He died for you and not for the angels, and therefore you are likely to be raised above the angels in many respects. You, who are set apart to the end that God might manifest to all eternity what the infinite power of Deity is able to raise a creature to. Are you in such a position? Oh, how beneath this position 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 shall be able to say to your soul, “Bow down to us!” [It] 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!” But 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.

c. Murmuring is below the spirit of a Christian.

The spirit of every Christian should be like the spirit of his Father. Every father loves to see his spirit in his child. Oh, the Lord Who is our Father loves to see His Spirit in us. We are one spirit with God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost; therefore, we should have a spirit that might manifest their glory.

Compare murmuring spirits to children when they are weaning. What a great deal of stir you have with your children when you wean them! How perverse and vexing they are! So, when God would wean you from some outward comforts in this world, oh, how fretting and discontented you are! When God would wean us from the world and we fret, vex, and murmur—this is a childish spirit.

d. It is below the profession of a Christian.

A Christian's profession is to be dead to the world and to be alive to God, to have his life hid with Christ in God, to satisfy himself in God. Is this your profession? Yet if you have not everything you want, you murmur and are discontented—in that, you even deny your profession.

e. It is below that special grace of faith.

Faith is what overcomes the world. It makes all the promises of God ours. 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. Know that when you are discontented for want of certain comforts, you should think thus: "I am discontented because I have not these things that God never yet promised me, and therefore I sin much against the Gospel and against the grace of faith."

f. It is below those helps that a Christian has more than others have.

A Christian has the promises to help him, which others have not. It is not so much for the heart of a Nabal to sink because he has nothing but the creature to uphold him (1Sa 25). But it is much for a Christian, who has the promises and ordinances to uphold his spirit, which others have not.

g. It is below the expectation that God has of Christians.

God expects not only that Christians should be patient in afflictions, but that they should rejoice and triumph in them (Jam 1:2). Now, Christians, when God expects this from you and you have not even attained to contentedness under afflictions, this is beneath what God expects from you!

h. It is below what God has had from other Christians.

Others have not only been contented with little trials, but they have triumphed over great afflictions. They have suffered the spoiling of their goods with joy! Read the latter part of the eleventh of the Hebrews, and you will find what great things God has had from His people. Therefore, not to be content with smaller crosses must needs be a great evil.

6. By murmuring, you undo your prayers.

When you come to pray to God, you acknowledge His sovereignty over you. You come there to profess yourselves to be at God's disposal. If you will come to petition Him and yet will be your own carver, you go contrary to your prayers. Now God does not teach any of you to pray, "Lord, give me so much a year, or let me have this kind of cloth and so many dishes at my table." Christ teaches us to pray, "Lord, give us our bread," showing that you should be content with a little.

OBJECTION: "But I do not know what would become of my children if I were to die. Or if I have bread now, I do not know where I shall get it from next week, or where I shall 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 content. Therefore, when we murmur because we have not so much variety as others have, it is against our prayers. We do not *in our lives* hold forth the acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God over us as we seem to acknowl-edge *in our prayers*.

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

a. *You come to lose a great deal of time.* How many times do men and women, when they are discontented, let their thoughts run, musing and contriving, through their present discontentedness—and they spend their time in vain! When you are alone you should spend your time in holy meditation, but you are spending your time in discontented thoughts! You complain that you cannot think on good things, but if you begin to think of them a little, soon your thoughts are off from them. But if you are discontented with anything, then you can go alone and roll things up and down in your thoughts to feed a discontented humor.

b. *It unfits you for duty.* If a man or woman is in a contented frame, you may turn such a one to anything at any time, and he is fit to go to God at any time. But when one is in a discontented condition, then a man or woman is exceedingly unfit for the service of God: it causes many distractions in duty.

c. *Consider what wicked risings of heart and resolutions of spirit there are many times in a discontented fit.* In some discontented fits, the heart rises against God and against others. Sometimes it even has desperate resolutions what to do to help itself. If the Lord had suffered you to do what you had 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! Had not God stopped you, but let you go on when you thought to help yourselves this way and the other way, oh, it would have been ill with you.

d. *Unthankfulness is an evil effect that comes from discontent*. Though men and women who are discontented enjoy many mercies from God, yet they are thankful for none of them. This is the vile nature of discontent—to lessen every mercy of God. It makes those mercies they have from God as nothing to them because they cannot have what they want.

Sometimes it is so even in *spiritual* things: if they do not have all the comforts they desire, then what they do have is nothing to them. Do you think that God will take this well? Suppose you were to give a friend some money to trade with, and he came and said, "What is this you have given me? There are only a few coins here. This is no good to me!" This would be intolerable to you that he should react to your gift like this, just because you have not given him as much money as he would like. It is just the same when you are ready to say, "All that God has given me is worthless. It is no good to me! It is only a few coins." For you to say that what God gives you is nothing and only common gifts, all given in hypocrisy and counterfeit when they are the precious graces of God's Spirit and worth more than thousands of worlds—how *ungrateful* it is! The graces of God's Spirit are nothing to a discontented heart that cannot have all that he would have.

And so for *outward* blessings: God has given you health of body and strength and has given you some way of livelihood; yet because you are disappointed in something that you would have, therefore all is nothing to you. Oh, what unthankfulness this is! God expects that every day you should spend some time in blessing His name for what mercy He has granted to you. There is not one of you in the lowest condition but you have an abundance of mercies to bless God for, but discontentedness makes them nothing.

Luther has [said], "This is the rhetoric[57] of the Spirit of God: to extenuate[58] evil things and to amplify good things; if a cross comes, to

make that cross but little; but if there is a mercy, to make the mercy great." Thus, if there is a cross, where the Spirit of God prevails in the heart, the man or woman will wonder that it is no greater—that is the work of the Spirit of God. And if there is a mercy, he wonders at God's goodness, that God granted so great a mercy. "But the devil goes quite contrary," says Luther, "he lessens God's mercies and amplifies evil things." Thus, a godly man wonders at his cross that it is not more; a wicked man wonders his cross is so much.

I will give you a striking example of this that we find in Scripture: it is the example of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16:12-13: "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?" Mark, they slighted the land that they were going to, the land of Canaan—that was the land that God promised them should 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 make their affliction in the wilderness greater than it was, though indeed it was to carry them to the land of Canaan. Though their deliverance from Egypt was a great mercy, they made it to be nothing, for they say, "You have brought us out of a land that floweth with milk and honey"—what land was that? It was the land of Egypt, the land of their bondage!—whereas they should have blessed God as long as they lived for delivering them out of the land of Egypt. Oh, what baseness there is in a discontented spirit! A discontented spirit, out of envy to God's grace, will make mercies that are great little, yea, to be none at all.

5. *Finally, murmuring causes shiftings of spirit.* Those who murmur are liable to temptations to shift for themselves in sinful ways. Discontent is the ground of shifting courses and unlawful ways.

8. There is a great deal of extreme folly in a discontented heart.

It is a *foolish* sin.

a. *You will not enjoy the comfort of what you have* because you have not got what you want! Do you not account this folly in your children? You

give them some food and they are not contented. Perhaps they say it is not enough. They cry for more, and if you do not immediately give them more, they will throw away what they have. Though you account it folly in your children, yet you deal thus with God: God gives you many mercies, but you see others [that] have more mercies than you; therefore you cry for more. But God does not give you what you want, and because of that, you throw away what you have—is not this folly in your hearts? It is unthankfulness!

b. *By all your discontent, you cannot help yourselves*. You cannot get anything by it. Who by taking care can add one cubit to his stature, or make one hair that is white to be black (Mat 6:27; 5:36)? You may vex and trouble yourselves, but you get nothing by it. Do you think that the Lord will come in mercy a whit[59] the sooner because of the murmuring of your spirits? Oh, no, but mercy will be rather deferred the longer for it! If you had a mind to give something to your child, yet if you see him in a discontented, fretting mood, you will not give it [to] him. And this is the very reason why many mercies are denied to you: you are discontented for lack of them, and therefore you do not get them.

c. *There are commonly many foolish attitudes* that a discontented heart is guilty of. They carry themselves foolishly towards God and towards men. Such expressions and such kinds of behavior come from them, as to make their friends ashamed of them many times. Their carriages are so unseemly[60] that they are a shame to themselves and their friends.

d. *Discontent and murmuring eat out the good and sweetness of a mercy before it comes*. If God should give a mercy for the want of which we are discontented, yet 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. If a child were to cry for a nut of which the meat has been eaten out, what good would the nut be to the child? So you would fain have a certain outward comfort and you are troubled for the want of it, but the very trouble of your spirits is the worm that eats the blessing out of the mercy.

Then perhaps God gives it to you, but if He gives it before you are humbled for your discontent, you can have no comfort from the mercy. It will be rather an evil than a good to you. Someone observes concerning manna, “When the people were contented with the allowance that God allowed them, then it was very good, but when they would not be content with God’s allowance, but would gather more than God would have them, then, says the text, there were worms in it” (see Exodus 16). So if we must

needs have more than God has provided in our current conditions, then there will be worms in it, and it will be no good at all!

e. *It makes our affliction a great deal worse than otherwise it would be*. It in no way removes our afflictions; indeed, while they continue, they are a great deal the worse and heavier. For a discontented heart is a proud heart, and a proud heart will not pull down his sails when a storm comes. If, when a storm comes, a sailor is perverse and refuses to pull down his sails, but is discontented with the storm, is his condition any better because he is discontented and will not pull down his sails? Will this help him? Just so is it, for all the world, with a discontented heart: a discontented heart is a proud heart. Out of his pride, he is troubled with his affliction and is not contented with God's disposal. So he will not 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 because he will not pull down his spirit? No, certainly, abundantly worse! It is a thousand to one but that the storm will overwhelm his soul.

9. There is a great deal of danger in the sin of discontent, for it highly provokes the wrath of God.

We find most sad examples in Scripture how God has been provoked against many for their discontent. In Numbers 14, you have a noteworthy text; and one would think that it was enough forever to make you fear murmuring. In the 26th verse, it is said, "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this *evil* [61] congregation, which *murmur* against me?" How justly may God speak this of many of you who are this morning before the Lord: "How long shall I bear with this wicked man or woman who has usually in the course of their lives murmured against Me 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 do not hear you; yet God hears the language of your murmuring hearts. Three times in one verse, He repeats *murmuring*, and this is to show His indignation against the thing. It follows in the 28th verse, "Say unto them, *As truly as I live*, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so I will do to you." Mark, God swears against a murmurer.

And what would God do to them? “Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein” (14:30). You see how it provokes God; there is more evil in it than you were aware of. Therefore, look to yourselves, and learn to be humbled at the very beginnings of such disorders in the heart.

So in Psalm 106:24-26, “Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto 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. We spoke before of how a murmuring heart slights God’s mercies, and so it is here: “They despised the pleasant land.” And a murmuring heart is contrary to faith: “they believed not his word: But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto 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 hearken to the voice of the Lord, there would not be such murmuring as there is.

But mark what follows after it! You must not think that no evil shall 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 God to lift up His hand against you. Perhaps God lays His finger on you softly in some afflictions, in your families or elsewhere, and you cannot bear the hand of God. 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.

In Numbers 16, compare these two verses together: “But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel *murmured* against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD” (16:41). “And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun” (16:46). Mark how God’s *wrath* is kindled: in the 41st verse, the congregation had murmured. They murmured only against Moses and Aaron, and in murmuring against God’s ministers, that was against God. If you murmur against those whom God makes instruments because you have not got everything that you would have—

against the Parliament or such and such who are public instruments—it is against God. It was only against Moses and Aaron that the Israelites murmured, and 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 hearts to deal thus with God: when God's hand is a little upon them, [they] murmur again and again and bring upon themselves infinite kinds of evils.

But now the anger of God was quickly kindled: "Oh," said Moses, "go, take the censer quickly, for wrath is gone out from Jehovah! The plague is begun." So while you are murmuring in your families, the wrath of God may quickly go out against you. 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." Similarly, a husband [should go] to go to God in prayer, falling down and beseeching Him that wrath may not come out against his family for the murmuring of his wife.

You have a notable example of God's heavy displeasure against murmuring in 1 Corinthians 10:10: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of 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 of the destroyer. What!—do you think that a certain cross and affliction stings you? Perhaps such an affliction is upon you, and it seems to be grievous for the present. What!—do you murmur and repine? God has greater crosses to bring upon you. What else are you doing but striving against your Maker? Your Maker has the absolute disposal of you: will you strive against Him? I may further say to you, as God spoke to Job when he was impatient: "Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:1-2). Where is the man or woman whose heart is so bold and impudent that he dares to speak against the administration of God's providence?

10. There is a great curse of God upon murmuring and discontent.

It is threatened as a curse of God upon men that they cannot be content with their present condition: "In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it

were even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning!" (Deu 28:67). So they lie tossing up and down and cannot be content with any condition that they are in because of the sore afflictions that are upon them.

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, most discontented, and the most dejected[62] creature that is. Now, therefore, [as] much discontent as you have, so much of the spirit of Satan you have. The unclean spirit 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 Satan. You should think with yourself, "Oh, Lord, have I the spirit of Satan upon me, who can find no rest at all?"

12. If you have a murmuring spirit, you must then have disquiet all the days of your life.

It is as if a man in a great crowd were to complain that other folks touch him. While we are in this world, God has so ordered things that afflictions must befall us. If we will complain and be discontented at every cross and affliction, we must complain and be discontented all the days of our lives! Indeed, God in just judgment will let things fall out on purpose to vex those who have vexing spirits and discontented hearts. People [too] will not be troubled much if they upset those who are continually murmuring. Oh, [those murmurers] will have disquiet all their days!

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

If you have a servant not content with his diet, wages, and work, you say, "Better yourselves [by going elsewhere for employment]." So may God justly say to us, "If My care over you does not please you, then take care of yourselves. If My protection over you will not please you, then 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 and care of God over you. If God were to say, “Well, you shall not have the benefit of My protection any longer, and I will take no further care of you,” would not this be a most dreadful judgment of God from heaven upon you?

Now then, my brethren, put all these points together for setting out a murmuring and discontented spirit. Oh, what an ugly face has this sin of murmuring and discontentedness! Oh, what cause is there that we should lay our hands upon our hearts, and go away and be *humbled* before the Lord because of this, for otherwise you will fall to it again!

You find in Scripture how strangely the people of Israel fell to their murmuring again and again. Do but observe three texts of Scripture for that, the first you have in the 15th of Exodus at the beginning. There you have Moses and the congregation singing to God and blessing God for His mercy: “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (15:1). Then, “The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him” (15:2). So he goes on, “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (15:11). Thus their hearts triumphed in God. But mark—before the chapter is ended, “And 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* [63] against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?” (15:23-24). 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 to their murmuring. You do *not* read that they were humbled for their former murmuring, and therefore they murmur again: “All the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin…And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness…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 did eat bread to the full” (16:1-3). They wanted water before, but now they want meat. They were not 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 somewhat[64] else. So one time after another, as soon as ever they had received the mercy,

then they were a little quieted—but they were not *humbled*. I bring these Scriptures to show this: if we have not been humbled for murmuring, *we will fall to murmuring again when we meet with the next cross*.

6. Aggravations of Murmuring

Now, because it is very hard to work upon a murmuring spirit, *we must consider aggravations* for the further setting out of the greatness of this sin.

1. To murmur when we enjoy an abundance of mercy

The greater and more abundant the mercy that we enjoy, the greater and viler is the sin of murmuring. For example, when God had newly delivered the people out of the house of bondage: for them to murmur because they lack some few things that they desire. Oh!—to sin against God after a great mercy is a most abominable thing.

For men and women to be discontented in the midst of mercies, in enjoyment of an abundance of mercies, aggravates the sin of discontent and murmuring. To be discontented in any afflicted condition is sinful and evil, but to be discontented when we are in the midst of God's mercies, when we are not able to count the mercies of God, to be discontented still because we have not got all we would have, this is a greater evil.

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 have not in your family all the comforts that you would have? Just as 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; when the public suffers grievous and hard troubles, if any man shall then rejoice and give 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 is a great aggravation of his sin.

So in particular, with the mercies that concern yourself and your family: if you would consider, you have many more mercies than afflictions. Let your afflictions be what they will, there is not one of you but has more mercies than afflictions.

OBJECTION: You will say, "Yes, but you do not know what our afflictions are because you do not feel them."

ANSWER: Though I cannot know what your afflictions are, yet I know what your mercies are. I know they are so great that I am sure there can be no afflictions in this world as great as the mercies you have—if it were only this mercy: that you have grace and salvation continued to you this day. Set any affliction beside this mercy and see which would weigh heaviest; this is certainly greater than any affliction. That you have the use of your reason, limbs, senses, that you have the health of your bodies—these are greater mercies than your afflictions.

We find in Scripture how the Holy Ghost aggravates the sin of discontent from the consideration of mercies: “And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi” (that is something, that you are sons of Levi), “Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath 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 unto them?” (Num 16:8-9). Korah and his company were murmuring, but it is a great honor and mercy that God puts upon any man to separate him in the service for Himself, to come near to Him, to minister to the congregation in holy things. It is such a mercy that one would think there should be 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 trouble and grieve their spirits; but this consideration, that God is pleased to employ them in such a service near to Himself, that though they cannot do good to themselves, yet they may do good to others, this should quiet them. Yet in the 10th verse: “And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also? For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?” (16:10-11). Have you not enough already? But you are still discontented with what you have and must have more.

Then a second Scripture is in Job 2:10, a speech of Job to his wife when she would have him curse God and die, which was a degree beyond murmuring. He said, “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” (Job 2:10). You see, Job helped himself against all murmuring thoughts against the ways of God with this consideration: he had received so much good from the Lord. What though we receive evil, yet do we not

receive good as well as evil? Let us set one against the other: that is the way we should go.

In Ecclesiastes 7:14, you find a notable Scripture whereby 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 hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.” Thus, when you are in prosperity, then indeed every man can be joyful, but what if afflictions befall you, what then? Then consider: “That God hath set one over against the other.” You have many troubles, and you have had many mercies: make one column of mercies and one column of afflictions, and see if God has not filled one column as full as the other. You look altogether upon your afflictions, but look upon your mercies also.

For instance, it may be God has afflicted you in one child, but He has been merciful to you in another child: set one against the other. God afflicted David in Absalom, but He was merciful to David in Solomon. Therefore, when David cried out, “O Absalom, my son, my son!” (2Sa 18:33), it would have quieted him. And it may be 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 possessions, but that 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. Therefore, you should set one against the other. And it concerns you to do so, for those mercies will be aggravations of your sins, and you had better make God’s mercies a means to lessen your sins, than to be the aggravation of your sins!

2. When we murmur for small things

Naaman’s servant said to him, “If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean [*a little thing*]?” (2Ki 5:13). So I say, if the Lord had required you to suffer some great thing, would you not have been willing to suffer? How much more this little thing!

Suppose God gives a woman a child who has all his limbs and parts complete, a child who is very comely with excellent gifts, wit, and memory. But maybe there is a wart growing on the finger of the child, and she murmurs at it—Oh, what an affliction this is to her! She is so taken up with

it that she forgets to give any thanks to God for her child. All the goodness of God to her in the child is swallowed up in that! Would you not say that this was folly and a very great evil in a woman to do so? Truly, our afflictions, if we weighed them aright, are but such things in comparison of our mercies. Rebekah had a mighty desire to have children, but because she found some trouble in her body when she was with child, said, “Why am I thus?” (Gen 25:22)—as if she should say, “I had rather have none,” only because she found a little pain and trouble in her body.

It is too much[65] for anyone to murmur over the heaviest cross that can befall one in this world; but to be discontented and murmur over some small things increases the sin of murmuring very much.

3. For men of gifts and abilities to whom God has given wisdom to be discontented and murmur is more than if others do it.

Murmuring and discontentedness is too much, yet we can bear with it sometimes in those who are weak. Yet for those who are men of understanding, who have wisdom, whom God employs in public service—that they should be discontented with everything is an exceedingly great evil.

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

What though we do not have all we would have, seeing what we have is free of cost! If what we have were earned, then it would be something; but when we consider that all is from God (1Co 4:7), to murmur at His dispensations[66] is very evil. Suppose a man were entertained in a friend’s family and did not pay for his board, but had it given him for nothing: you would not expect him to be ready to find fault with everything in the house—with servants, with the meat at table, or the like. If one who has plentiful provision and all given him gratis[67] should be discontented when a cup is not filled for him as he would have it, or when he has to wait a minute longer for a thing than he would—we would reckon this a great evil. So it is with us: we are at God’s table every day, and whatever we have is free.

Now when we are at the table of God (for all God's administrations to us are His table) and are free from lusts,[68] for us to be discontented and finding fault is a great aggravation of our sin.

5. To be discontented and impatient when we have the things for the want of which we were discontented before

So it is sometimes with children: they will cry for a thing; and when you give it them, then they throw it away—they are as much discontented as they were before. So it was with the people of Israel: nothing would quiet them but they must have a king (1Sa 8:19). Samuel would have persuaded them to the contrary and told them what kind of king they would have; and when they had a king, they were not contented (Hos 10:3). So Rachel must have children or else she died (Gen 30:1), and when she had a little trouble she was discontented too. So that, as we say, we are not well, either full or fasting.

6. To be discontented when God has raised you from a low position

There was a time when you were low enough, and perhaps when you were so low you said, "Oh, if God would deliver me from such an affliction or give me but a little more wealth, I should think myself in a good condition." But if God by His providence does raise you, you are still as greedy of more and as much discontented as you were before.

It is 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 and set him at your own table, could you bear that he should complain that some dish is not well dressed? You could not bear it if your children should do it, but you could bear it a great deal better from them than to hear such a one do it. But *you* are a poor beggar, and God has, as it were, taken you into His great family; and if the Lord has been pleased to raise you higher, so that now you may be of service in the place where God has set you—now will you be discontented because you have not everything that you desire? We know that when the prodigal came to himself, he said, "In my father's house is

bread enough" (*see* Luk 15:11-32); he did not say, "There is a great deal of dainties." No, he thought of nothing but bread. So it is common for many, when they are in a low condition, to think that if they may have bread and any competence, they will be contented and bless God; but when they have their bread and things convenient, then they must have more or else they are not contented. This is an exceedingly great aggravation to your discontent: when you are raised from a very low condition, and yet you cannot be contented with what you have.

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

For men and women who have the guilt of very many sins upon them and have brought themselves in a most dreadful manner under the sentence of God's justice, yet God having been pleased to reprieve them—for them to be discontented with God's administrations towards them is exceedingly evil. Oh, it were consideration enough to quiet any murmuring in our hearts to think thus: "We are but sinners; why should we not be sufferers who are sinners?" But then consider, we who are such great sinners, guilty of such notorious sins that it is a wonder that we are out of hell at the present—for *us* to be discontented and murmur increases our sin exceedingly! Consider how we have crossed God in our sins; then if God should cross us in the way of our sufferings, should not we sit down quiet without murmuring? Certainly, you who are discontented at any administration of God towards you never knew what it was to be humbled for your manifold sins!

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

If you have a beast that you make much use of, you will feed it well. Yet if you have but little use of him, then you turn him into the commons. [69] Little provision serves his turn because you do not make use of him. If we lived so as to be exceedingly useful to God and His Church, we might expect that God would be pleased to come in some encouraging way to us; but when our consciences tell us we live and do but little service for God, why, what if God should turn us upon the commons? We are being fed

according to our work. Why should any creature be serviceable to you, who are so little serviceable to God? To meditate on this alone would much help us.

9. For us to be discontented when God is about to humble us

It should be the care of a Christian to observe what God's ways towards him are. Let me join with the work of God, when He offers mercy to me, to take the mercy He offers. But is God about to humble me?—let me join with God [also] in this work of His. This is how a Christian should walk with God. And what is it to walk with God? It is to observe what work God is now about and to join with God in that work of His so that, according as God turns this way or that way, the heart should turn with God and have workings suitable to the workings of God towards him.

Now, I am discontented and murmuring because I am afflicted; but this is *why* you are afflicted: God would humble you. The great design God has in afflicting you is to break and humble your heart. And will you maintain a spirit quite opposite to the work of God? For you to murmur and be discontented is to resist the work of God!

10. The more remarkable the hand of God appears to bring about an affliction, the greater is the sin of murmuring in that affliction.

That is to say, when I see the Lord working in some remarkable way about an affliction beyond what anyone could have thought of, shall I resist such a remarkable hand of God? Indeed, before the will of God is apparent, we may desire to avoid an affliction and may use means for it. But when we see God expressing His will from heaven in a manner beyond what is ordinary, then certainly it is right for us to fall down and submit to Him, and not to oppose God when He comes with a mighty stream against us.

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 speak to them in a more solemn way, then if they should disregard what you say, you are very impatient. So, certainly, God cannot

take it well whenever He appears from heaven in such a remarkable way to bring an affliction, if then we do not submit to Him.

11. Though God has been exercising us for a long time under afflictions, yet still to remain discontented

When the yoke is first put upon a heifer and it wriggles up and down and will not be quiet, if after many months or years it will not draw quietly, the husbandman would rather fatten it and prepare it for the butcher than be troubled any longer with it. “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb 12:11). It is true: our afflictions are not joyous, but grievous. Though it is very grievous when our affliction first comes, afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness. When you have been a long time in the school of afflictions, you are a very dullard if you have not learned this contentment. “I have *learned*,”[70] said Paul, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phi 4:11). Paul had learned this lesson quickly, [but] you have been learning many years!

A new cart may creak and make a noise; but after it has been used a while, it will not do so. So when you are first a Christian, perhaps you make a noise and cannot bear affliction; but are you an old Christian and yet will you be a murmuring Christian? Oh, it is a shame for any who have been a long time in the school of Jesus Christ to have murmuring spirits.

7. The Excuses of a Murmuring Heart

Now, my brethren, because this discontented humor is tough[71] and very hard to work on (there is none who is discontented but has something to say for their discontent), I shall therefore seek to take away what every discontented heart has to say for himself.

1. One that is discontented says, "It is not discontent; it is a sense of my condition."

Perhaps when God takes away a friend, they are wringing their hands as if they were undone. But let anyone speak to them and they say, "Would you not have me sensible of [72] my affliction?" Thus, many would hide their sinful murmuring under God's hand with this pretense: it is but "sensibleness of their affliction." To that I answer—

a. There is no sense of any affliction that will *hinder the sense of God's mercies*. Nay, the more we are sensible of our afflictions, providing it is 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!

b. If it were but a bare sense of an affliction, it would not *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 you are so sensible of the affliction that you are made unfit for the performance of the duties of the condition that God has put you in. Surely, it is more than mere sense of your affliction!

c. If it were but a mere sense of your affliction, then you could in this your condition *bless God for the mercies that others have*. But your discontentedness usually breeds envy at others. When people are discontented with their condition, they have an envious spirit at the conditions of those who are delivered from what afflictions they bear.

Certainly, then, it has turned sour when you are so sensible of your afflictions and insensible of mercies, that you are unfit for the duties of your condition and envious of others who are not afflicted as you are.

2. But a discontented heart will say, "I am not so much troubled with my afflictions, but it is for my sin rather than my affliction."

Do not deceive your own heart; there is a very great deceit in this. There are many people who, when God's hand is against them, will say they are troubled for their sin; but the truth is, it is the affliction that troubles them rather than their sin.

a. *They were never troubled for their sin before this affliction came*. But you will say, "It is true I was not before, for my prosperity blinded me. But now God has opened my eyes by afflictions." Has He?—then your great care will be rather for the removing of your sin than your affliction. Are you more solicitous[73] about the taking away of your sin than the taking away of your affliction?

b. If it is your sin that troubles you, then even if God should take away your afflictions, *unless your sin is taken away and your heart is better, this would not content you*. You could not be satisfied. But we usually see that if God removes their afflictions, they have no more trouble for their sin.

c. If you are troubled for your sin, then it will be your great care *not to sin in your trouble, so as not, by your trouble, to increase your sin*. But the truth is, you are troubled in such a way that you 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!

3. "Oh," says another, "I find my affliction is such that God withdraws Himself from me in my affliction."

"That is what troubles me; can anybody be quiet when the Lord withdraws Himself?" Now to that I answer thus:

a. For you to make such a conclusion—that God has departed every time He lays an affliction upon you—is *a sinful disorder of your heart, very dishonorable to God and grievous to His Spirit*. In Exodus 17:7, you see how God was displeased with such a disorder as this: "And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the

children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?" Mark, they murmured because they were brought into afflictions. But see what the text says, "They *tempted* the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?" This was tempting God. Sometimes we are afraid God is departed from us, and it is merely because we are afflicted. I beseech you to observe this Scripture: God calls it "tempting Him" when He afflicts people and they conclude that He is departed from them. If a child should cry out and say that his father is turned to be an enemy to him because he corrects him, this would be taken ill.

b. If God is departed, *the greatest sign of God's departing is because you are so disturbed*. If you could only cure your disquiet, then you would find God's presence with you. Your disquiet drives Him from you, and you can never expect God's coming to manifest Himself comfortably to your souls, until you have gotten your hearts quiet under your afflictions. 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. If ever I would have the presence of God come again to me, let my heart be quiet under the hand of God."

c. *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? What an unwise course I take! If the child sees the mother going from it, it is not for the child to say, My mother is gone yonder and I will go the other way; no, but the child goes crying after the mother. So should the soul say, I see the Lord is withdrawing His presence from me, and now it is best for me to make after the Lord with all my might!

4. "But when men deal so unreasonably and unjustly with me, I do not know how to bear it."

"I can bear that I should be in God's hands, but not in the hands of men." For taking away this reasoning, consider,

a. Though they are men who bring this cross on 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: "God has a hand in it," he said, "and though Shimei is a wicked man, yet I look beyond him to God" (*see* 2Sa 16:5-12). So, do any of your friends

deal injuriously with you? Look up to God, and see that man but as an instrument in God's hands.

b. If this is your trouble, that men do so wrong you, *you ought rather to turn your hearts to pity them 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 a great deal better to *bear* wrong than to *do* wrong. Socrates[74] said, "If I meet a man in the street who is a diseased man, shall I be vexed and fretted with him because he is diseased? Those who wrong me I look upon as diseased men, and therefore pity them."

5. *"Oh, but the affliction that comes upon me is an affliction which I never looked for."*

"That is what makes my heart so disturbed, because it was altogether unlooked for and unexpected." For the answer of this,

a. *It is your weakness and folly that you did not look for it and expect it*. In Acts 20:22-23, see what Paul says concerning himself, "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." "It is true," he says, "I do not know the particular affliction that may befall me, but this I know: the Spirit of God witnesses that bonds and afflictions shall abide me everywhere." So a Christian should do: he should look for afflictions wheresoever he is, in all conditions. Therefore, no affliction should come unexpectedly to a Christian!

b. *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 should you be to sanctify God's name in it* now that it is come. We should have spent some pains before to prepare for afflictions, and we did not. We should then take so much the more pains to sanctify God in this affliction now.

6. *"Oh, but it is very great! My affliction is exceeding great."*

"If you felt my affliction, which I feel, you would think it hard to bear and be content." To that I answer,

a. Let it be as great an affliction as it will, *it is not as great as your sin*. God has punished you less than your sins.

b. It might have been a great deal more: *you might have been in hell*. And it is, if I remember, Bernard's[75] saying: he said, "It is an easier matter to be oppressed than to perish."

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

7. "But however you may lessen my affliction, yet I am sure it is far greater than the affliction of others."

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

b. If it were greater than others' were, *why should you be discontented the more because God is gracious to others?*

c. Is your affliction greater than others'? *Then in this, you have an opportunity to honor God more than others*: exercise more grace than other men. Let me labor to do it then.

8. They think they would be more contented if the affliction were any other than it is.

a. *You must know that we are not to choose our own rod that God shall beat us with*.

b. *It may be that if it were any other than it is, it would not be so suitable for you as this is*. It may be, therefore, God chooses it because it is the most contrary to you, since it is most suitable for purging out the humor that is in you. If a patient comes to take medicine and finds himself sick by it, will he say, "Oh! If it were any other potion I could bear it"? It may be that it would not suit your disease, if it were any other than it is. It would not get right to the sinful humor in your soul; therefore, God sees this to be the fittest and the most suitable for you.

c. *Know that to be fitted for any condition is the excellence of grace in a Christian*; not only to say, if it were this or that, but if it were *any*. Now if

a sailor has skill, he does not say, “If it were any other wind but this, if the wind blew in any direction but this, I could manage my ship. I could show skill in other directions, but not in this.” Would not sailors laugh at such a one? It would be a shame for him to say that he has skill in any other direction but this. So it should be a shame for a Christian to say that he has skill in any other affliction but this. A Christian should be able to manage his ship—if the wind blows any way, to guide his soul any way.

d. *Know that the Lord has rewards and crowns for all graces and for honoring them in all conditions*. It may be that God has another crown to set upon the heads of those who honor Him in such a way as this. He has several sorts of crowns in heaven, and those crowns He must put upon somebody’s head. Therefore, He exercises you in a variety of conditions so that you might have the several rewards and crowns that God has to reward those who are faithful in several conditions.

9. “Oh, but the condition that God has put me in makes me unserviceable,[76] and this troubles me.”

If you can say, as in the presence of God, “I would rather bear any trouble in the world if I might do *more* service, than be freed from trouble and be laid aside and do *little* service”—it is a good sign of grace. Yet there may be a temptation in this. To murmur at God’s disposal, when your calling is low and you can do little service, is many times a temptation to those who are poor and of weak gifts and must work hard to provide bread for their families. It is many times a grievous burden to them to think, “The Lord uses other men in public service, and I live in an obscure way. To what purpose is my life?” To help against this temptation, that you may not murmur against this condition,

a. *Do but consider that though your condition is low and mean,*[77] *yet you are in the Body*—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 (*see* 1Co 12:14-27). Augustine[78] has said: “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.” So it is with all men of the world: they are just like great boughs cut off from the tree. Though they have excellent gifts, great wealth, and glory in the world, they have no union with Jesus Christ the root.

b. *Though you have only a mean calling in this world and are not regarded as a man of use in the world, yet if you are a Christian, God has called you to a higher calling*. Your general calling is a high calling, though your particular calling[79] is but low and mean. There is a place for that in Philippians 3:14: "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." So 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.

c. *Your calling is low and mean; yet do not be discontented with that, for you have a principle within you of grace* (if you are a godly man or woman). This raises your lowest actions to be higher in God's esteem than all the brave, glorious actions that are done in the world.

The truth is, it is more obedience to submit to God in a low calling than to submit to Him in a higher calling. For it is sheer 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, which do not in the other.

d. *Know further that there is likely to be more reward*. For when the Lord comes to reward, He does not examine what work men and women have been exercised in, but what their faithfulness has been. "Well done, good and *faithful* servant," said the Lord (Mat 25:23).[80] Now you may be faithful in little as well as others are in more by going on and working your day's labor.

10. "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 low, yet if it were in a settled way, I could be content. But it is so inconstant that I never know what to trust to, but am tossed up and down in the world." Now to that I answer,

Perhaps God sees it is better for you to live in a continual dependence upon Him and not to know what your condition shall be on the morrow than for you to have a more settled condition in terms of the comforts of the creature. Do but remember what we spoke of before, that Christ does not

teach you to pray, “Lord, give me enough to serve me for two or three years,” but, “this day our daily bread” (*see* Mat 6:11). This is to teach us that we must live upon God in a dependent condition every day. Here was the difference between the land of Canaan and Egypt: the land of Canaan depended on God for the watering of it with showers from heaven; but Egypt had a constant way of watering the country that did not so much depend upon heaven for water, but upon the River Nile. Knowing this, they grew more proud. In Canaan, they lived always in dependence upon God, not knowing what should become of them. Now God thought this to be a better land for His people *who were to live by faith*—that they should be continually depending upon Him. We find by experience that when those who are godly live in the greatest dependence upon God and have not a 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 Ezra 4:13 in their writing to Artaxerxes, of the objection that the enemies had against the people of Israel’s building of the wall of the city: “Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up *again, then* will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and *so* thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.” “If the wall be built,” they say, “then they will refuse to pay toll to the king; that is, they are in no city with walls, and the king may come upon them when he will. But if once they come to build a wall and can defend themselves, and have not their dependence upon the king as before, then they will deny paying tribute.” So it is thus between God and men’s souls: when a soul lives in mere dependence upon God, so that sensibly he sees that God has advantage of him every moment, then such a soul exercises faith and begs every day his daily bread. But if God hedges that man about with wealth, he is not 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 it better for His people to live in a *dependent* condition. [But] we are very loath in respect of God to be dependent; we would all be independents in this way.

This may be your comfort: though for outward things you are mightily unsettled; yet for the great things of your soul and eternal welfare, there you are settled. There you have a settled way, a constant way of fetching supply:

of His fullness, we receive grace for grace (Joh 1:16). You have there an abundance of treasure to go to and 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:[81] in the Covenant of Works God gave man a stock to trade with, but He put it into his hand so that he might trade and gain or lose. But in the Covenant of Grace, God makes sure: the stock is kept in the hand of Christ, and we must go to Him for supply continually.

11. "If I never had been in a better condition, then I could bear this affliction."

"There was a time when I prospered more, and therefore now it is harder for me to be brought low as at present." But it is the most unreasonable thing of any for us to murmur upon this ground,

a. *For is your eye evil because God has been good to you heretofore* (*see* Mat 20:1-15)? Do you look upon your condition with an evil eye now because God was once good to you? Has God done you any wrong because He formerly did more good to you than He did to others?

b. *We should look at all our outward prosperity as a preparation for afflictions*. If when you had great wealth, 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 say, "Have I wealth now? I should prepare for poverty. Have I health now? I should prepare for sickness. How do I know what God may call me to?"

Sailors who are in a calm prepare for storms. Would they say, "If we never had calms we could bear storms, but we have had calms so many years or weeks together that this is grievous"? In your calm, you are to prepare for storms, and the storm will be less.

Oh, this consideration would help us all. If God should now say, "Well, you will 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. Now you reason quite contrary: whereas you should bless God that you have had so much comfort, you make what you have had before an aggravation of your afflictions now, and so murmur and are discontented.

On what terms did you hold what God gave you before? Did you hold it so that you have in your papers, “To have and to hold forever”? *God gives no such thing!* If God gives me an understanding of Himself, faith, humility, love, patience, and such graces of His Spirit, He gives me them forever. If He gives me Himself, His Christ, His promises, and His covenant, He gives me them forever. Who am I, therefore, that I must have fair weather all my days? [The good that] God gives to me, He gives as a pledge of His love. Let me return it to Him as a pledge of my obedience. 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.

12. “Oh, but after I have taken a great deal of pains for this comfort, yet then I am thwarted[82] in it.”

There will be more testimony of your love to God, if you now yield up yourself to God in what cost you dear. Shall I offer that to God, said David, that which “cost me nothing” (2Sa 24:24). Your outward comforts have cost you much, and you have taken great pains to obtain them. Now, if you can submit to God in the lack of them, your love in this is the more shown.

13. They think to keep it in.

“Though I confess that my affliction is hard and I feel trouble within, yet I do not break out to the dishonor of God. I keep it in, although I have much ado with[83] my own heart.” Oh, do not satisfy yourselves with that! —for the disorders of your hearts and their sinful workings are as words before God. “My soul, be silent to God.” It is not enough for your tongue to be silent, but your *soul* must be silent. If you do not mortify that inward sullenness,[84] it will break forth at last when you are afflicted a little more.

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*. Because they concern your own hearts, you may so much the better remember them.

Part Three: Applications and Conclusion

8. How to Attain Contentment

Now we are coming to the close of this point of contentment which Jesus Christ teaches those who are in His school. There are only these two things for working your hearts to this grace of Christian contentment: 1. To propound several considerations for contenting the heart in any afflicted condition; 2. To propound directions [for] what should be done for working our hearts to this.

1. Considerations to content the heart in any afflicted condition

a. *We should consider*, in all our wants and inclinations to discontent, *the greatness of the mercies that we have and the meanness of the things we lack.* If we are godly, the things we lack 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, the things for the want of which people are discontented and murmur are such things as reprobates[85] have or may have—[things such] as your wealth is not so great, your health not so perfect, your credit not so much. You may have all those things and still be a reprobate! Shall I be discontented for not having that, when God has given me what makes angels glorious? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with *all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"* (Eph 1:3).[86]

b. *The consideration that God is beforehand with us with His mercies* should content us. Oh, you have had mercy enough already to make you spend all the strength you have and time you shall live to bless God! I remember reading of a good man who had lived to fifty years of age and enjoyed his health for eight and forty years exceedingly well, and lived in prosperity; but the last two years, his body was exceedingly diseased. But

he reasoned the case with himself thus: “Oh, Lord, You might have made all my life a life of torment and pain, but You have let me have eight and forty years in health. I will praise Your mercies for what I have had and will praise Your justice for what now I feel.” Suppose God should now take away your wealth from some of you who have lived comfortably a great while; you will say, “That aggravates our misery that we have had wealth.” But it is through your *unthankfulness* that it does so.

c. *The consideration of the abundance of mercies that God bestows and we enjoy*. It is a saying of Luther: “The sea of God’s mercies should swallow up all our particular afflictions.” Name any affliction that is upon you: there is 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 is no sign of it. So, we think afflictions considered in themselves are very great; but let them be considered with the sea of God’s mercies we enjoy, and then they are nothing in comparison.

d. *Consider the way of God towards all creatures*. God carries on all creatures in a vicissitude[87] of several conditions. Thus, we do not always have summer, but winter succeeds summer; we do not always have day, but day and night; we do not always have fair weather, but fair and foul. Now seeing God has so ordered things with all creatures that there is a mixture of conditions, why should we think it much that there should be a vicissitude of conditions with us, sometimes in a way of prosperity and sometimes in a way of affliction?

e. *The creatures suffer for us; why should not we be willing to suffer to be serviceable to God?* God subjects other creatures: they are fain to lose their lives for us, to lose whatever beauty and excellence they have, to be serviceable to us. Why should not we be willing to part with anything in service for God?>

Master Hooper,[88] which we read of in *[Foxe’s] Book of Martyrs*, has this comparison: 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, the brute beasts must die, must be roasted in the fire, must come onto the plate, be hacked all in pieces, must be chewed in the mouth, and in the stomach turned to that which is loathsome if one should behold it—and all to nourish me, to be useful to my body—and shall not I be willing to be made anything for God, for His service? If God will take away my wealth and make me poor; if God will take away life, hack me to pieces, put me in

prison—whatever He does, yet I shall not 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 much 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 plates 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 of the infinite God?"

f. *Consider that we have but a little time in this world.* If you are godly, you will never suffer except in this world. As that martyr said to his fellow martyr, "Do but shut your eyes, and the next time they are opened you shall be in another world." These afflictions are but for a moment (2Co 4:17). When a sailor is at sea, he does not think it much if a storm arises, especially if he can see the heavens clear beyond it. He says, "It will be over soon." Consider, we have not long to live; it may be over before our days are at an end. But supposing it should not, death will put an end to all. All afflictions and troubles will soon be at an end.

g. *Consider the condition that others have been in, who have been our betters*. *Jacob*—who was the heir of Abraham, Isaac, and the promise—yet he goes over Jordan with a staff and lives in a very poor and mean condition for a long time. *Moses* might have had all the treasure in Egypt. Yet what a low condition he lived in, when he went to live with Jethro his father-in-law forty years on end! Afterwards, when he returned to Egypt, he had only one beast to carry him. And we know how *Elijah* was fed with ravens, and how he had to shift for his life from time to time and run into the wilderness up and down. So did *Elisha*; he was many times in a low condition. The *prophets of God* were hid in a cave by Obadiah and were fed there with bread and water. The prophet *Jeremiah* [was] put into a dungeon, and oh, how he was used! It would be endless to name the particulars of the great sufferings of the people of God.

It is likewise useful for men and women of wealth to go to poor people's houses and see how they live. You would go away and see cause to bless God and say, "If I were in such a condition as they are in, what should I do? How could I bear it? Yet what reason is there that God so orders and disposes of things that they should be so low in their conditions and I so high? I know no reason but free grace: God will have mercy upon whom He

will have mercy (Rom 9:18).” These are good considerations for the furtherance of contentment.

h. *Before your conversion, you were contented with the world without grace, though you had no interest in God or Christ. Why cannot you now be contented with grace and spiritual things without the world?* I make no question but you find it so, that when you have 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 (Rom 8:28-29).

2. What course to take that we may attain this grace of contentment

The main thing that I intend by way of [application] is to propound what to do for helping our hearts to contentment.

a. *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 outside; you know there must be ballast within the ship to make it go steady. So there is nothing outside us that can keep our hearts in a steady, constant way, but grace within the soul.

b. *If you would get a contented life, do not grasp too much of the world.* Do not take in more of the business of the world than God calls you to; for if a man goes among thorns when he may take a simpler way, he has no reason to complain that he is pricked with them. For such is the nature of all things here in this world: everything has some prick or other in it.

c. *Be sure of your call to every business you go about.* Though it is the least business, be sure of your call 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: “When I meet with any cross, I know I am where God would have me.” What God calls a man to, in *that* he may have comfort whatever befalls him.

d. *What has just been said is especially true if I add, “I walk by rule in the work that I am called to.”* I must walk by the Word and order myself in this business according to God’s mind as far as I am able. Now add this to the other, and then the quiet and peace of the soul may be made even perfect in a way. When I know that I have not put myself on the work, 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.

If you will subject all things under you, subject yourself to God, and then, the truth is, all things *are* under you. Be willing to be absolutely under God's command, and then all things in the world are under you. The Apostle says that all things are yours, life and death, everything is yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1Co 3:22-23). You will say, "How are they my servants? I cannot command them." They are servants in this: God *orders them all to work for your good*. Subject yourself to God, and all things shall be subjected to you.

So long as we keep within our bounds, we are under protection; but if once we break our bounds, we must expect it to be with us as it is with the deer in the park.[89] While the deer keep within the pale,[90] no dogs come after them. 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 rule that God has set them in His Word, and then they are protected by God. They may go about their business in peace, and God provides for them. But if they go beyond the pale, if they pass their bounds, then they may expect to meet with troubles, afflictions, and discontent. Therefore, that is a fourth direction: walk by rule.

e. *Exercise much faith*: that is the way for contentedness. A man may go very far with the use of reason alone to help him to contentment; but when reason is at a nonplus,[91] then set faith at work. If you have any faith in the time of extremity, think thus: this is the time that God calls for the exercise of faith. What can you do by your faith? I can do this: I can in all states cast my burden upon God in peace (1Pe 5:7).

Therefore, when reason can go no higher, let faith get on the shoulders of reason and say, "I see land, though reason cannot see it. I see 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 up yourself to God in a believing way, the more peace and quiet you will have.

f. *Labor to be spiritually minded.* That is, be often in meditation of the things that are above. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (Col 3:1).

Those who are struck by a snake, it is because they tread on the ground. If they could be lifted up above the earth, they need never fear being stung by the snakes that are crawling underneath. So I may compare the sinful distemper[92] of murmuring to snakes that crawl back and forth

below—but if we could get higher, we should not be stung by them. A heavenly conversation[93] is the way to contentment.

g. *Do not promise yourselves too much beforehand*; do not reckon on too great things. It is good for us to take hold very low and not think to pitch too high. Do not soar too high in your thoughts beforehand, to think, "Oh, if I had *this* and *this*," and imagine great matters to yourselves; but be as good Jacob. You know he was a man who lived a very contented life in a mean condition, and he said, "If God…will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on" (Gen 28:20). So if we would not pitch our thoughts high and think that we might have what others have, we would not be troubled so much when we meet with disappointments. So Paul says, "Having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1Ti 6:8); he did not soar too high aloft. Those who look at high things in the world meet with disappointments, so they come to be discontented. Be 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: "Seekest thou great things for thyself?" said the Lord to Baruch, "seek them not" (Jer 45:5). Be willing to take hold low; and if God raises you, you will have cause to bless Him. But if you should not be raised, there would not be much trouble. One who creeps low cannot fall far, but it is those who are on high whose fall bruises them most.

h. *Labor to get your hearts mortified, that is, dead to the world.* We must not content ourselves that we have gotten some reasoning about the vanity of the creature, and such things as these; but we must exercise mortification (Rom 8:13) and be crucified to the world (Gal 6:14). We should "die daily" to the world (1Co 15:31). We are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom 6:3) to signify that we profess to be even as dead men to the world. Now, no crosses that fall out in the world trouble those who are dead! If our hearts were dead to the world we should not be much troubled with the changes of the world or the tossings about of worldly things. It is very noteworthy in those soldiers who came to break the bones of Christ that they found He was dead, so they did not break His legs. Let afflictions and troubles find you with a mortified heart to the world, and they will not break your bones. Those whose bones are broken by crosses and afflictions are those who are alive to the world. But no afflictions or troubles will break the bones of one who has a mortified heart and is dead to the world.

The things in which our happiness consists are of a different kind, and we may be happy without these—this is a kind of deadness to the world.

i. *Let not men and women pore*[94] *too much upon their afflictions*, that is, busy their thoughts too much to look down into their afflictions. You find many people whose thoughts are taken up about what their crosses and afflictions are. It is just with them as with a child who has a sore: his finger is always on the sore. Oh, no marvel that you live a discontented life, if your thoughts are always poring over such things. You should rather labor to have your thoughts on those things that may comfort you.

j. *If any good interpretation can be made of God's ways towards you, make it*. You think it much if you have a friend who always makes bad interpretations of your ways towards him; you would take that badly. Thus, when an affliction befalls you, many good senses may be made of God's works towards you. You should think thus, "It may be that God intends only to try me by this. It may be God saw my heart was too much set on the creature, and so He intends to show me what is in my heart. It may be that God saw that if my wealth did continue, I should fall into sin, that the better my position was the worse my soul would be. It may be God intended only to exercise some grace. It may be God intends to prepare me for some great work that He has for me." Thus you should reason.

But we, on the contrary, make bad interpretations of God's thus dealing with us and say, "God does not mean this. Surely, the Lord means by this to manifest His wrath and displeasure against me!" Just as they did in the wilderness, God hath brought us hither to slay us (Exo 17:3). Oh, why will you make these worst interpretations when there may be better? When the Scripture speaks of love, it says, "Love thinketh no evil" (1Co 13:5). So, though ten interpretations might be presented to you concerning God's way towards you, and if but one is good and nine bad, you should take that one that is good and leave the other nine.

Sarah had a speech to her husband in Genesis 18:12. She called her husband "lord." There was only that one good word in a bad, unbelieving speech; yet when the Apostle mentions that speech in 1 Peter 3:6, the Holy Ghost leaves all the bad and commends her for calling her husband "lord," putting a reverent title upon her husband. Thus, how graciously God deals with us! So should we do if there is only one good interpretation that we can make of a thing; we should rather make use of the good one than the bad. Take heed of judging God to be a hard master (Mat 25:24). Make good

interpretations of His ways, and that is a special means to help you to contentment in all one's course.

k. *Do not so much regard the fancies*[95] *of other men, as what indeed you feel yourselves*. For the reason of our discontentment many times is rather from the fancies of other men than from what we find we lack ourselves.

You may think your wealth to be small, and you are thereupon discontented; it is a grievous affliction to you. But if all men in the world were poorer than you, then you would not be discontented. You would rejoice in your estates, though you had not a penny more than you have. You would have no more then than you have now. Therefore it appears by this that it is rather from the fancies of other men than what you feel that makes you think your condition to be so grievous. For if all the men in the world looked upon you as more happy than themselves, then you would be contented. Oh, do not let your happiness depend upon the fancies of other men.

l. Be not inordinately taken up with the comforts of this world when you have them. It is a certain rule: however inordinate any man or woman is in sorrow when a comfort is taken from them, so were they immoderate in their rejoicing in the comfort when they had it. For instance, God takes away a child, and 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, yet when I see this—though you are a mere stranger to me—I may without breach of charity conclude that your heart was immoderately set upon your child, husband, or any other comfort that God has taken away. If you hear ill tidings about your estates, your hearts are dejected immoderately, and you are in a discontented mood because of such and such a cross, certainly your hearts were immoderately set upon the world. So likewise for your reputation, if you hear others report this or that ill of you, and your hearts are dejected because you think you suffer in your name, your hearts were inordinately set upon your name and reputation. Therefore, the way for you not to be immoderate in your sorrow for afflictions is not to be immoderate in your delights when you have prosperity.

These are the principal directions for our help that we may live quiet and contented lives.

3. Conclusion

My brethren, if I were to tell you that I could show you a way never to be in lack of anything, I do not doubt but then we should have much flocking to such a sermon. But what I have been preaching to you now comes to as much. Is it not almost all one: never to be in want or never to be without contentment? Oh, the Word holds forth a way full of comfort and peace to the people of God even in this world. You may live happy lives in the midst of all the storms and tempests in the world. There is an ark that you may come into. No men in the world may live such comfortable, cheerful, and contented lives as the saints of God.

But God forbid that it should be said of any of us concerning this lesson, as the Apostle says of widows, that they were ever learning and never came to the knowledge of the truth (2Ti 3:7). Oh, let us not be ever learning this lesson of contentment and yet not come to have skill in it. You would think it much if you had been at sea twenty years, and yet had attained to no skill in your art of navigation. You will say, “I have used the sea twenty years and I hope I may know by this time what concerns the sea.” Oh, that you would but say so in respect of the art of Christianity! When anything is spoken concerning the duty of a Christian, Oh that Christians could but say, “I have been a Christian so long, and I hope I am not wanting in a thing that is so necessary for a Christian.” Here is a necessary lesson for a Christian, that Paul said, he had learned in all estates “therewith to be content.”

Short Biography of Jeremiah Burroughs

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) was an English Congregationalist and a well-known Puritan preacher. He graduated from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1624, but left the university because of non-conformity. In 1631 he became rector of Tivetshall, Norfolk. He was suspended for non-conformity in 1636, and went to Rotterdam the next year to become "teacher" of the English church there. He returned to England in 1641 and served as preacher at Stepney and Cripplegate, London. He was a member of the Westminster Assembly and one of the few who opposed the Presbyterian majority. While one of the most distinguished of the English Independents, he was one of the most moderate, acting consistently in accordance with the motto on his study door "difference of belief and unity of believers are not inconsistent."

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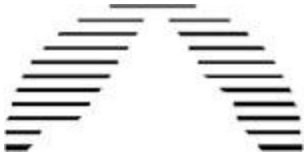

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[1] **cordial** – medicine, food, or beverage that invigorates the heart; exhilarating drink.

[2] **want** – what one lacks.

[3] **conversation** – conduct; behavior.

[4] **contentment** – see *Free Grace Broadcaster* 213 "Contentment," from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

[5] **peevish** – easily irritated by unimportant things.

[6] **sedate** – calm; composed.

[7] **importunate** – persistent.

[8] **resignation** – unresisting acceptance.

[9] **repining** – grumbling; expressing discontent.

[10] **tumultuousness** – the state of commotion and confusion.

[11] For more on this, see *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, by Thomas Brooks (1608-1680), available as a booklet from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

[12] **gracious heart** – heart born of the Holy Spirit and brought into union with Christ.

[13] **shiftings** and **shirkings** – methods used to achieve an objective quickly, regardless of whether they are fair, right, or wise in the long term and avoiding one's responsibilities

[14] **quick and lively** – alive and active.

[15] **sanctify** – to honor as holy

[16] **ado** – difficulty.

[17] **trading** – carrying on a trade; business.

[18] **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German monk, theologian, and university professor, whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.

[19] **wants** – things that are lacking.

[20] **must needs** – must of necessity.

[21] **humors** – attitudes; dispositions; taken from early medical theory that certain vapors moved through the body causing abnormal moods.

[22] **Mediator** – one who goes between two parties to remove a disagreement or reach a common goal; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (1689 London Baptist Confession, 8.1, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY).

[23] **acting faith** – the act of believing; exercising faith.

[24] **trebled** – tripled.

[25] **quintessence** – the purest or most perfect form of something.

[26] **creature** – created thing, perhaps a person or creature comfort.

[27] **a whit** – the least bit.

[28] **fain** – eager.

[29] **liquor** – any liquid.

[30] **John Bradford** (c.1510-1555) –English, taught at Cambridge, preached in London, burned at the stake for refusing to deny his faith by order of the Roman Catholic Queen Mary.

[31] **woolsack** – a sack or bag of wool; specifically, the seat of the speaker of the House of Lords, being a large square sack of wool covered with scarlet.

[32] **aye** – yes.

[33] **jostle** – push, elbow, or bump against someone roughly, typically in a crowd.

[34] **Pompey the Great** (106-48 BC) – a Roman general and political leader who quarreled with Caesar and fled to Egypt where he was murdered.

[35] **dearth** – scarcity or lack of something; famine.

[36] **finger…eye** – weeping.

[37] **providence** – God's…most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions. (Spurgeon's Catechism, Q. 11) The Catechism is available from Chapel Library.

[38] **efficacy** – capacity or power to produce a desired effect.

[39] Martin Luther, Genesis 37:33, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 6: *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 31-37*, ed. Pelikan, Oswald, and Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1999).

[40] **makes use of sin** – God does not approve of sin and is not the author of sin, but He uses the occurrence of sin for the good of His people—a great mystery in God's wisdom.

[41] **froward** – not willing to yield; stubbornly contrary.

[42] **constant tenor** – steady course or habit of life.

[43] **fretted** – worrying unnecessarily or too much.

[44] **axletree** – the rod that connects two opposite wheels of a wagon or carriage.

[45] **wont** – in the habit of doing; accustomed.

[46] **Plutarch** (c.46-120) – Greek historian, biographer, essayist, and follower of Plato.

[47] **Pyrrhus** (319-272 BC) – Greek general and king of Epirus (306-302, 297-272 BC) and Macedon (288-284, 273-272 BC); one of the strongest opponents of early Rome.

[48] **dainty, nice, and froward** – difficult to please, luxurious, and unwilling.

[49] **coy** – quiet.

[50] **in lieu of** – instead of; in the place of.

[51] **boisterousness** – storminess; violence.

[52] **rankle** – discharge pus; fester.

[53] **sedition** – actions or words intended to provoke rebellion against government authority.

[54] **trifle** – matter of little value or importance.

[55] **mean…base** – lacking in moral dignity and unworthy.

[56] **meanest** – most common.

[57] **rhetoric** – eloquent language of persuasion.

[58] **extenuate** – diminish in size.

[59] **a whit** – to the smallest degree.

[60] **carriages…unseemly** – conduct is so inappropriate.

[61] Emphasis in this and the next two verses added.

[62] **dejected** – downcast; disheartened.

[63] Emphasis added.

[64] **somewhat** – something.

[65] **too much** – more than can be endured.

[66] **dispensations** – the arrangement of events by divine providence.

[67] **gratis** – free of charge.

[68] **lusts** – longing desires, with eagerness to possess what is lacking.

[69] **commons** – common grazing-ground in a village, where the only food was the field grass.

[70] Emphasis added.

[71] **humor…tough** – attitude is not easily overcome.

[72] **sensible of** – feeling; perceiving by the inward feelings.

[73] **solicitous** – extremely careful.

[74] **Socrates** – Greek philosopher.

[75] **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – French monastic reformer known for his devotion.

[76] **unserviceable** – unable to be of service; useless.

[77] **mean** – inferior; common.

[78] **Augustine**(AD 354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian known by many as the father of orthodox theology; born in Tagaste, North Africa.

[79] The Puritans taught that believers have a twofold calling: their particular calling, which was to their daily occupation and work, and their general calling to be Christians.

[80] Emphasis added.

[81] **Covenant of Works** and **Covenant of Grace** – theological terms for God's relation to man in Adam and in Christ. See *The Covenants: Of Works and of Grace* by Walter Chantry, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

[82] **thwarted** – obstructed; hindered.

[83] **much ado with** – much trouble or difficulty in.

[84] **sullenness** – moody, resentful disposition.

[85] **reprobates** – unbelievers left in their sins and abandoned by God to judgment.

[86] Emphasis added.

[87] **vicissitude** – a state of constant change or alteration.

[88] **John Hooper** (c. 1495-1555) – English Protestant Reformer, burned to death during the persecutions of Bloody Mary; his views influenced the Puritans under Elizabeth I.

[89] **park** – enclosed tract of land held by royal grant for keeping beasts of the chase.

[90] **pale** – enclosed area within the park in which the deer are safe.

[91] **nonplus** – state in which no more can be said or done.

[92] **distemper** – disturbance of mind.

[93] **conversation** – lifestyle.

[94] **pore** – think intently; focus.

[95] **fancies** – imaginations.

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