

THE RARE JEWEL  
OF CHRISTIAN  
CONTENTMENT

BY JEREMIAH BURROUGHS

*With an Introduction by Nancy Wilson*



# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY NANCY WILSON . . . . .	i
<b>SERMON I . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
The Words Opened . . . . .	1
I. Christian contentment is inward . . . . .	5
II. It is quiet. . . . .	7
III. It is a frame of spirit. . . . .	12
IV. It is a gracious frame. . . . .	17
V. It is a frame of freely submitting . . . . .	20
VI. Freely submitting . . . . .	22
VII. Taking complacency in God's disposal . . . . .	23
VIII. It submits to God's disposal. . . . .	26

IX. In every condition. . . . .	27
<b>SERMON II . . . . .</b>	<b>29</b>
Contentment a mystery . . . . .	29
I. A Christian is content, yet unsatisfied . . . . .	35
II. A Christians comes to contentment by subtraction . . . . .	39
III. By adding another burden to that he has . . . . .	42
IV. By changing the affliction to another . . . . .	45
V. By doing the work of his condition . . . . .	48
VI. By melting his will into God's will . . . . .	51
VII. By purging out that which is within . . . . .	53
<b>SERMON III . . . . .</b>	<b>55</b>
VIII. He lives by the dew of God's blessings . . . . .	56
IX. A Christian sees God's love in affliction. . . . .	61
X. His afflictions sanctified in Christ . . . . .	63
XI. He fetches strength from Christ. . . . .	66
XII. He makes up his wants in God. . . . .	69
XIII. He fetches contentment from the covenant . . . . .	74
<b>SERMON IV. . . . .</b>	<b>79</b>

## INTRODUCTION

What a pleasure it is for me to write an introduction to this classic Puritan book. I first read it in the early 1990's when I was becoming acquainted with the writings of the Puritans. I had thought I knew something about Christian contentment, but here was fresh application and conviction on every page. I quickly discovered that my understanding and application of contentment had been very thin, and Burroughs took it to new breadths and depths.

Gaining so much from reading it myself, I went on to lead groups of women through *The Rare Jewel* in 1992, 1994, 1997, and again in 2006. We read a chapter a week, and when we met together, I taught through an outline of the chapter, and we discussed the practical ramifications of all we were learning. It was a transforming experience, reshaping my thinking and transforming my Christian worldview. I am indebted to Jeremiah Burroughs for teaching me that contentment is a way of viewing the world and not simply an isolated virtue. If God's hand is in everything that comes to pass, then it is our duty as Christians to find contentment in all circumstances. Burroughs takes great pains to teach us how to do this, and not only does this book explain the nature of contentment, but it also works as a how-to guide as well. He gives some very practical lessons on how to find and keep and maintain a contented spirit, but none of this contentment can be achieved apart from

# SERMON I

*At Stepney, July 27, 1645*

*The Words Opened*

“**F**or I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Philippians 4:11.

Here is a very seasonable cordial to revive the drooping spirits of the saints in sad and sinking times; for the hour of temptation is already come upon all the world to try the inhabitants of the earth. Our great apostle experimentally holds forth in this gospel text the very life and soul of all practical divinity, wherein we may plainly read his own proficiency in Christ’s school, and what lesson every Christian that would evidence the power and growth of godliness in his own soul must necessarily learn from him. These words are brought in by St. Paul as a plain 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 care for a great estate; he had better things to take up his heart withal. “I do not speak,” says he, “in respect of want, 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.”

“I have learned.” Contentment in every condition is a great art, a special mystery. It is to be learned, and so to be learned as a mystery, and therefore, verse 12, he affirms, “I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed.” The word which is translated “instructed” is derived from a word which signifies mystery, and it is as much as if he had said, I have learned the mystery of this business. Contentment is to be learned as a great mystery, and those that are thoroughly trained up in that are have learned a deep mystery, which is as Samson’s riddle to a natural man (Judg. 14:14). “I have learned it.” It is not now to learn. Neither had I it at first; I have attained it, though with much ado, and now, by the grace of God, I am become master of this art.

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

“Therewith to be content.” The word which we render “content” here has in the original much elegance, and fullness of signification in it. In strictness of phrase, it is only attributed unto God, who has styled himself “God all-sufficient,” as resting wholly satisfied in and with himself alone, but he is pleased freely to communicate of his fullness to the creature, so that from God in Christ the saints “receive grace for grace” (John 1:16), insomuch that there is in them an answerableness of the same grace in their proportion that is in Christ. And in this sense St. Paul says, “I have a self-sufficiency,” as the word denotes.

But has St. Paul a self-sufficiency? 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” (2 Cor. 3:5). His meaning therefore 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 accommodations to supply my necessities, yet I enjoy portion enough betwixt Christ and my own soul abundantly to satisfy me in every condition. And this interpretation

is suitable to that place, "A good man is satisfied from himself" (Prov. 14:14) and agreeable to what he verifies of himself in another place, that "though he had nothing, yet he possessed all things," because he had right to the covenant and promise which virtually contains all, and an interest in Christ, the Fountain and good of all, and having that, no marvel he says that in whatsoever state he was, he was content. Thus you have the genuine interpretation of the text. I shall not make any division of the words, because I take them only to prosecute that one duty most necessary, namely, the quieting and comforting the hearts of God's people under the troubles and changes they meet withal in their heart-shaking times. And the doctrinal conclusion is in brief this:

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

This evangelical truth is held forth sufficiently in scripture, yet take one or two parallel places more for the confirmation of it. In 1 Tim. 6:6, 8, you have both the duty expressed, and the glory: "Having food and raiment," says ver. 8. "let us therewith be content." There is the duty. "But godliness with contentment is great gain" (ver. 6); there is the glory and excellency of it, as if godliness were not gain, except there were contentment withal. The like exhortation you have in Heb. 13:5: "Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have." I do not find any apostle or writer of scripture treat so much of the spiritual mystery of contentment as this our apostle has done throughout his epistles.

For the clear opening and proving of this practical conclusion, I shall endeavor to demonstrate these four things:

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

Second, the are and mystery of it.

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

Fourth, wherein the glorious excellences of this grace do principally consist.



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

I shall break open this description, for it is a box of precious ointment, very comfortable and useful for troubled hearts, in troubled times and conditions.

# CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, I

*Christian contentment is inward*

Contentment, I say, is a sweet, inward, heart thing; it is a work of the Spirit within doors. It is not only a not seeking help to ourselves by outward violence, or a forbearance of discontented murmuring expressions, in froward words and carriage against God and others, but it is the inward submission of the heart. Ps. 62:1: "Truly, my soul waits upon God," and ver. 5, "My soul, wait you only upon God." So it is in your books, but the words may be translated as rightly, "My soul, be you silent unto God. Hold your peace, O my soul." Not only the tongue must hold its peace, but the soul must be silent. Many may sit down silently, forbearing discontented expressions that are inwardly swollen with discontentment. Now, this manifests a perplexed distemper, and a great frowardness in their hearts; and God, notwithstanding their outward silence, hears the peevish fretting language of their souls. The shoe may be smooth and neat without, whilst the flesh is pinched within. There may be much calmness and stillness outwardly, and yet wonderful confusion, bitterness, disturbance, and vexation within. Some are so weak that they are not able to contain the disquietness of their own spirits,

but in words and behavior discover what woeful perturbations there are within, their spirits being like the raging sea, casting forth nothing but mire and dirt, being not only troublesome to themselves, but all those they live with. Others there are who are able to keep in such distempers of heart (as Judas did when he betrayed Christ with a kiss) but still they boil inwardly and eat like a canker, as David speaks concerning some whose words are smoother than honey and butter, and yet have war in their hearts. And as he says in another place, "Whilst I kept silence, my bones waxed old." So these, whilst there is a serene calm upon their tongues, have yet blustering storms in their spirits, and whilst they keep silence, their hearts are troubled, and even worn away with anguish and vexation; they have peace and quiet outwardly, but war from the unruly and turbulent workings of their hearts, that is within. If the attainment to true contentment were as easy as keeping quiet outwardly, there need be no great learning of it; it might be had with less skill and strength than an apostle had, yea, than an ordinary Christian has, or may have. Therefore, certainly there is a great deal more in it than can be attained by common gifts, and ordinary power of reason, which often bridles in nature; it is a heart-business.

## CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, II

*It is quiet*

**I**t is the quiet of the heart, all is sedate and still there.  
1. And to understand this the better, this quiet gracious frame of spirit, it is not opposed to a due sense of affliction. God does give leave to his people to be sensible of what they suffer. Christ does not say, "Do not count that a cross which is a cross," but, "Take up your cross daily." As it is in the body natural, if the body takes physic and is not able to bear it, but presently casts it up, or if it be not at all sensible, if it stir not the body; either of those ways the physic does no good, but argues the body much distempered, and will hardly be cured; so it is with the spirits of men under afflictions. If either they cannot bear God's potions, but cast them up again, or are not sensible of them, and their souls are no more stirred by them than the body is by a draught of small beer, it is a sad symptom that their souls are in a dangerous and almost incurable condition. So that this inward quietness is not in opposition to the sense of affliction; for indeed there were no true contentment if you were not apprehensive and sensible of your afflictions when God is angry.

2. It is not opposed to an orderly making our moan and complaint to God and to our friends. Though a Christian ought to be quiet under God's correcting hand, yet he may, without any breach of Christian contentment, complain to God. As one of the ancients says, though not with a tumultuous clamor and screeching out in a perplexed passion, yet in a quiet, still, submissive way he may unbosom his heart unto God, and likewise communicate his sad condition to his gracious friends, showing them how God has dealt with him, and how heavy the affliction is upon him, that they may speak a word in due season to his wearied soul.

3. It is not opposed to all lawful seeking out for help unto another condition, or simply endeavoring to be delivered out of the present affliction by the use of lawful means. No; I may lay in provision for my deliverance and use God's means, waiting on him, because I know not but that it may be his will to alter my condition, and so far as he leads me, I may follow his providence; 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 prayer we seek unto him for deliverance, till we know his good pleasure therein. And certainly thus seeking for help with such a submission and holy resignation of spirit to be delivered when God will, and as God will, and how God will, so that our wills are melted into the will of God, this is no opposition to the quietness which God requires in a contented spirit.

Question. But then, what is this quietness of spirit opposed unto?

Answer. 1. To murmuring and repining at the hand of God, as the discontented Israelites often did, which, if we ourselves cannot endure 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. It is a speech I remember of a heathen: "A wise man may grieve under, but not be vexed with his afflictions." There is a vast difference betwixt a kindly grieving and a distempered vexation

3. To tumultuousness of spirit. When the thoughts run distractingly and work in a confused manner so that the affections are like the unruly

multitude in Acts, who knew not for what end they were come together. The Lord expects that you should be silent under his rod, and, as the town clerk said in Acts 19:36, "You ought to be quiet, and do nothing rashly."

4. To unsettledness and unfixedness of spirit, whereby the heart is taken off from the present duty that God requires in our several relations, both toward God, ourselves, and others. We should prize duty at a higher rate than to be taken off by every trivial occasion. A Christian indeed values every service of God so much that though to some it may be, in the eye of the world and to natural reason, as light empty business, beggarly rudiments, foolishness, yet seeing God calls for it, the authority of the command does so overawe his heart that he is willing to spend himself and to be spent in the discharge of it. It is an expression of Luther's, "Ordinary works that are done in faith and from faith are more precious than heaven and earth." And if this be so, and a Christian know it, it is not a little matter that should divert him, but he should answer every avocation, and resist every temptation, as Nehemiah did Sanballat, Geshem, and Tobiah, when they would have hindered the building of the wall, with this, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work of the Lord cease?" (Neh. 6:3).

5. To distracting heart-eating cares and fears. A gracious heart so estimates its union with Christ, and the work God sets it about, as 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, but he would not suffer the fear and noise of evil tidings to take such possession in his soul as to make a division and struggling there. A great man will permit common people to stand without his doors, but he will not let them come in, and make a noise in his closet or bedchamber, when he purposely retires himself from all worldly employments; so a well-tempered spirit, though it may inquire after things abroad without doors in the world, and suffer some ordinary cares and fears to break into the suburbs of the soul, so as to have a light touch upon the thoughts, yet it will not,

upon any terms, admit of an intrusion into the privy chamber, which should be wholly reserved for Jesus Christ as his inward temple.

6. To sinking discouragements, when things fall not out according to expectation, when the tide of second causes runs so low that we see little left in the outward means, to bear up our hopes and hearts, that then the heart begins to reason as he in 2 Kings, "If the Lord should open the window of heaven, how should this be?" (7:2), never considering that God can open the eyes of the blind with clay and spittle; he can work above, beyond, nay, contrary to means. He often makes the fairest flowers of man's endeavors to wither, and brings improbable things to pass that the glory of enterprises may be given to himself. Nay, if his people stand in need of miracles to work their deliverance, miracles fall as easily out of God's hands as to give his people daily bread. God's blessing is many times secret upon his servants, that they know not which way it comes. As, "Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain, yet the valley shall be filled with water" (2 Kings 3:17). God would have us depend on him, though we do not see the means how the thing should be brought to pass, else we do not show a quiet spirit; though an affliction be upon you, let not your heart sink under it. So far as your heart sinks and you are discouraged under your affliction, so much you want of this lesson of Contentment.

7. To sinful shiftings and shirkings out for ease and help, as we see in Saul turning to the witch of Endor, and his offering sacrifice before Samuel came. Nay, the good king Jehoshaphat joins himself with Ahaziah (2 Chron. 20:37), and Asa goes to Ben Hadad king of Assyria, "for help, not relying upon the Lord" (2 Chron. 16:7-8), though the Lord delivered the Ethiopian army into his hands, consisting of a thousand thousand (2 Chron. 14:11). And good Jacob joined in a lie with his mother to Isaac; he was not content to stay God's time, and use God's means, but made too much haste, and stepped out of his way to procure the blessing which God intended for him. Thus many do through the corruption of their hearts and weakness of their faith, because they are not able to trust

God and follow him fully in all things always, and for this cause the Lord often follows the saints with many sore temporal crosses, as we see in Jacob, though they obtain the mercy. It may be your wretched carnal heart thinks, I care not how I be delivered, so I may but get free from it. Is it not so many times in some of your hearts, when any cross affliction befalls you? Have you not such kind of workings of spirit as this: "O that I could but be delivered out of this affliction any way, I would not care." Your hearts are far from being quiet. And this sinful shifting is the next thing in opposition to this quietness which God requires in a contented spirit.

8. The last thing that this quietness of spirit is opposite to is desperate risings of heart against God in a way of rebellion. This is most abominable. I hope many of you have learned so far to be content as to keep down your hearts from such distempers, and yet the truth is, not only wicked men, but sometimes the very saints of God, find the beginnings of this: when an affliction lies long, and is very sore and heavy upon them indeed, and strikes them as it were in the master vein, they find somewhat of this in their hearts, arising against God, their thoughts begin to bubble, and their affections begin to stir, in rising against God himself. Especially such as, together with their corruptions have much melancholy, and the devil working both upon the corruption of their hearts, and the melancholy distemper of their bodies, though here may lie much grace at the bottom, yet there may be some risings against God himself under affliction. Now Christian quietness is opposite to all these things. That is, when affliction comes, be it what affliction it may be, yet you do not murmur, though you be sensible, though you make your moan, though you desire to be delivered, and seek it by all good means, yet you do not murmur nor repine, you do not fret nor vex, there is not that tumultuousness of spirit in you, there is not unsettledness in your spirits, there are not distracting fears in your hearts, no sinking discouragements, no base shiftings, no rising in rebellion any way against God. This is the quietness of spirit under an affliction, and that is the second thing, when the soul is so far able to bear an affliction as to keep quiet under it.



# CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, III

*It is a Frame of Spirit*

**I**t is an inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit. It is a frame of spirit, and then a gracious frame of spirit. Contentment is a soul-business. By frame of spirit, I mean these three things: there are three things considerable when I say contentment consists in the quiet frame of the spirit of a man.

1. It is a grace that spreads itself through the whole soul. As thus, contentment is in the judgment, that is, the judgment of the soul of a man or woman tends to quiet the heart. In my judgment I am satisfied, that is one thing to be satisfied in one's understanding and judgment, as thus: this is the hand of God, and this is that which is suitable to my condition, or best for me. Although I do not see the reason of the thing, yet I am satisfied in my judgment about it.

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

And then it comes to the will: my will yields and submits to it, my affections are all likewise kept in order, so that it goes through the whole soul. There is in some a partial contentment, and so it is not the frame of

the soul, but some part of the soul has some contentment, as thus: many a man may be satisfied in his judgment about anything, and yet cannot for his life rule his affections, nor his thoughts, nor the will, though the judgment be satisfied. I make no question but many of you may know this by your own experience if you do but observe the workings of your own hearts. Cannot you say, when such an affliction befalls you, I can bless God, I am satisfied in my judgment about it. I have nothing in the world to say in respect of my judgment against it. I see the hand of God, and I should be content, yea, I am satisfied in my judgment that my condition is a good condition in which I am, but I cannot for my life rule my thoughts, my will, and my affections; methinks I feel my heart heavy, and sad, and troubled more than it should be, and yet my judgment is satisfied. This seemed to be the case of David, "O my soul, why are you disquieted?" (Ps. 42:5).

David, as far as his judgment went, there was a contentedness; that is, his judgment was satisfied in the work of God upon him, yet he was troubled, but he knew not wherefore, "O my soul, why are you thus cast down within me?" That psalm is a very good psalm for those who feel a fretting, discontented distemper in their hearts at any time, for them to be reading or singing: he has it once or twice in that psalm, "Why are you cast down, O my soul?" In verse 5, "And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him, for the help of his countenance." David had enough to quiet him, and that which he had prevailed with his judgment; but after it had prevailed with his judgment, he could not get it further. He could not get his grace of contentment to go through the whole frame of the soul. There is a great deal of stir sometimes to get contentment into their judgments, that is, to satisfy their judgments about their condition. Come to many that the hand of God is upon, perhaps in a grievous manner, and seek to satisfy them, and tell them that there is no such cause to be disquieted. O, not such cause! says the troubled spirit! O then there is no cause that any should be disquieted! There was never any such affliction as I have, and

a hundred things they have, to put off what is said to them, so that you cannot so much as get into their judgments to satisfy them. But there is a great deal of hope of contentment, if once your judgments come to be satisfied, that you can sit down and say in your judgments, I see cause to be contented, but though you have gotten thus far, yet you may have much to do with your hearts afterwards. For there is such unruliness in our thoughts and affections that our judgments are not able always to rule our thoughts and affections, and that makes me to say that contentment is an inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, that is, the whole soul, judgment, thoughts, will, affections, and all, are satisfied and quiet. I suppose, in the very opening this, you begin to see it is a lesson you had need learn, and it is not a thing soon got, if contentment be such a thing as this is.

2. Spiritual contentment comes from the frame of the soul. A man or woman that is contented in a right way, their contentment does not so much come from outward arguments or any outward thing that helps them to be content, as it does from the disposition of their own hearts; it is the disposition of their own hearts that causes this contentment, that brings forth this gracious contentment, rather than any external thing that does it. As thus I would open myself: one that is disquieted, suppose a child, or man, or woman; if you come and bring them some great matter to please them that perhaps will quiet them, and they will be contented; it is the thing you bring them that quiets them, but it is not the disposition of their own spirits, not from any good temper that there is in their own hearts, but from some external thing that is brought them. But when a Christian is contented in a right way, the quiet does come more from the inward temper and disposition of his own heart than from any external arguments or possession of anything in the world. I would yet open this further to you in this similitude. The being content upon some external thing is like the warming of a man's clothes by the fire, but being content by the inward disposition of the soul is like the warmth that a man's clothes has from the natural heat

of his body. A man that is of a healthful body, he puts on his clothes, and perhaps when he puts them on at the first in a cold morning, he feels his clothes cold, but after he has them on a little while, they are warm. Why, how came they warm? They came not nigh the fire? No, but it came from the natural heat of his body. Now a sickly man, that has his natural heat decayed, if he put on his clothes cold, they will not be warm in a long time, but he must have them warmed by the fire, and then they will quickly be cold again, so this will difference the contentments of men. There are some men now that are very gracious, and when an affliction comes upon them, indeed at first it seems to be a little cold, but after it has been on a while, the very temper of their hearts being gracious, it makes their afflictions easy, and makes them quiet under it, and not to complain of any discontentment. But now you shall have others that have an affliction upon them, that have not this good temper in their hearts, their afflictions are very cold upon them, and grievous, and it may be, if you bring them some external arguments, somewhat from without, as the fire that warms the clothes, perhaps they will be quiet for a while, but, alas! Wanting a gracious disposition within, in their own hearts, that warmth will not hold long. The warmth of the fire, that is, a contentment that comes merely from external arguments, will not hold long; but that holds which does come from the gracious temper of the spirit; it is from the frame and disposition of the spirit of a man or woman. There is the true contentment. But this we shall speak to farther in the opening of the mystery of contentment.

3. It is the frame of spirit that shows the habitualness of this grace of contentment. Contentment is not merely one act, a flash in a good mood; you shall have many men and women, that, take them in some good mood, and they will be very quiet; but this will not hold; this is not a constant way; there is not a constant tenor of their spirits, to be holy and gracious under afflictions. But, I say, it is the quiet frame of spirit; by that I mean, the habitual disposition of their souls, that it is

not only at this time, and the other time, when you take men and women in a good mood; but it is the constant tenor and temper of the heart. That is a Christian, who has learned this lesson of contentment, that in the constant tenor and temper of heart is contented, and can carry itself quietly in a constant way, or else it is worth nothing; for there is nobody that is so furious in their discontent, but will be quiet in some good mood or other. Now, first, it is a heart business; second, it is the heart-quiet; and then, third, it is the frame of the heart.

# CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, IV

*It is a gracious frame*

**I**t is the gracious frame of the heart. Indeed, in contentment there is a composition of all graces; if the contentment be spiritual, if it be truly Christian, there is, I say, a composition of all spiritual graces. As it is in some oils, there is a composition of a great many very precious ingredients; so in this grace of contentment, which we shall yet further speak of, in the opening of the excellency of it. But now the gracious frame of spirit is in opposition to these things:

1. In opposition to the natural stillness that there is in many men and women. There are some of such a natural constitution that makes them to be more still and more quiet than others; others are of a violent and hot constitution, and they are more impatient than others.

2. In opposition to a sturdy resolution. As some men, through the strength of some sturdy resolution, they have not seemed to be troubled, let come what will come, and so it may be, through a sturdy resolution, at sometimes they are not so much disquieted as others are.

3. In way of distinction, from the very strength of reason: though not sanctified, the strength of natural reason may quiet the heart in some

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

You will say, wherein is this graciousness of contentment distinguished from all these? More of this will be spoken to when we show the mystery of it and the lessons that are learned, but now we may speak a little by way of distinction here: as now, from the natural stillness of men's spirits, many men and women have such a natural stillness of spirit, and constitution of body, that you shall find them seldom disquieted. But, now mark these kind of people that are so: they, likewise, are very dull, of a dull spirit in any good thing; they have no quickness, nor liveliness of spirit in that which is good, but now mark where contentment of heart is gracious, the heart is very quick and lively in the service of God, yea, the more any gracious heart can bring itself to be in a contented disposition, oh, the more fit it is for any service of God, and is very active and lively in God's service, not dull in the service of God. And, as a contented heart is very active and stirring in the work of God, so he is very active and stirring in sanctifying God's name in the affliction that does befall him. The difference will appear very clear thus: one that is of a still disposition is not disquieted, indeed, as others; neither has he any activeness of spirit in sanctifying the name of God in the affliction, but now, one that is content in a gracious way, as he is not disquieted, but keeps his heart quiet in respect to vexing and trouble, so, on the other side, he is not dull nor heavy, but is very active to sanctify God's name, in the affliction that is upon him. For it is not enough merely not to murmur, not to be discontented and troubled, but you must be active in sanctifying God's name in the affliction. And, indeed, this will distinguish it from the other; from a sturdy resolution, I will not be troubled, but, though you have a sturdy resolution that you will not be troubled, is there a conscientiousness in you to sanctify God's name in your affliction, and does it come from thence? That is the main thing which brings the quiet of heart and helps against

discontentedness in a gracious heart. I say, the desire and care that your soul has to sanctify God's name, in an affliction, it is that which quiets the soul, which does not in the other; neither when it is merely from reason. As it is said of Socrates, though he was but a heathen, that, whatever befell him, he would not so much as change his countenance, and he got his power over his spirit merely by strength of reason and morality, but now, this gracious contentment comes from principles beyond the strength of reason. I cannot open that, from whence it comes, till we come to open the mystery of spiritual contentment. I will only give you this one note of difference between a man and a woman that is contented in a natural way, and another that is contented in a spiritual way. Those that are contented in a natural way, overcome themselves when outward afflictions befall them. They are contented; yea, and they are contented as well when they commit sin against God, either when they have outward crosses, or when God is dishonored, it is all one, either when they themselves are crossed, or when God is crossed; but, now a gracious heart, that is contented with its own affliction, yet mightily rises when God is dishonored.



# CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, V

*It is a frame of spirit freely submitting*

**F**reely submitting to and taking complacency in God's disposal; it is a free work of the spirit. Now there are four things to be opened in this freedom of spirit.

1. That the heart is readily brought over: that which one does freely, there is no great stir to bring them to it. There are many men and women, when their afflictions are grievous upon them, with much ado they are brought to be contented; a great deal of stir there is to quiet their hearts when they are under affliction, yet at last, perhaps, they are brought to it; but, now this does not come off freely. If I desire a thing of another, and I get it, perhaps with much ado, and there is a great deal of stir; but here is no freedom of spirit, but when a man is free in a thing, do but mention it, and he presently comes off to it. So, if you have learned this art of contentment, you will not only be contented, after a great deal of ado, to quiet your hearts, but readily, as soon as ever you do come to think that it is the hand of God, your heart presently closes.

2. Freely, that is, not by constraint, not patience by force, as we used to say. As many say that you must be content, "This is the hand of God, and there

is no help for it! Oh, this is too low an expression for Christians, yet, when Christians come to visit one another, they say, 'Friend or neighbor, you must be content'; this is too low an expression for a Christian, "Must be content." No, readily and freely, I will be content. It is suitable to my heart to yield to God and to be content; I find it a thing that comes off of itself that my soul will be content. Oh, you should answer your friends so, who come and tell you you must be content; nay, I am willing to yield to God, and I am freely content. And then a free act comes after a rational way, that is freedom; that is, it does not come through ignorance, because I know no better condition, or, that I know not what my affliction is, but it comes through a sanctified judgment, for that is the reason that no creature can do an act of freedom, but the rational creature. The liberty of action is only in rational creatures, and it comes from hence; for that is only freedom and out of liberty, that is wrought in a rational way, as a natural freedom is, when I, by my judgment, see what is to be done, understand the thing, and then there is a closing with what I do understand in my judgment, that is freely done; but now if a man does a thing, and understands not what he does, he cannot be said to do freely. So, if men are contented, but it is because they understand not what their affliction is, or because they understand no better; this is not freely. As, for instance, suppose a child born in a prison, and never in all his life went out, the child is contented. Why? Because he never knew better; but this is no free act of contentment. But now, for men and women who do know better, who know that the condition in which they are in is an afflicted condition, and a sad condition, and yet they can bring their hearts to be content, out of a sanctified judgment, this is freedom.

3. This freedom, it is in opposition to stupidity; for a man and woman may be contented merely out of want of sense. This is not free: as a man in a dead palsy, that does not feel you nip his flesh, he is not freely patient, but if one should have his flesh nipped, and feel it, and yet for all that can be able to bridle himself, and do it freely, that is another matter. So it is here: many are contented merely out of stupidity, they have a dead palsy upon them, but now a gracious heart has sense enough, and yet is contented, and therefore is free.

## CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, VI

### *Freely submitting*

**F**reely submitting to and taking complacency in God's disposal. Submitting to God's disposal, what is that? The word "submit" signifies nothing else but to "send under," as thus, one that is discontented, the heart will be unruly, and would even get above God so far as discontentment prevails, but now comes the grace of contentment, and sends it under; to submit, it is to send under a thing. Now, when the soul comes to see the unruliness that there is in it, here is the hand of God that brings an affliction, and my heart is troubled and discontented. What says the soul? Will you be above God? Is it not God's hand, and must your will be regarded more than God's? O under, under, you shall get under, keep under, keep low, keep under God's feet. You are under God's feet, and keep under his feet, keep under the authority of God, the majesty of God, the sovereignty of God, the power that God has over you. Keep under, that is, submit; then the soul can submit to God, when it can send itself under the power, and authority, and sovereignty, and dominion that God has over it: that is the sixth particular; yea, but that is not enough yet. You have not got to this grace of contentment, except in the next place you take a complacency in God's disposal.

# CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, VII

*A complacency in God's disposal*

That is, thus: I am well pleased in what God does, so far as I can see God in it, though, as I said, I may be sensible of the affliction, and may desire that God in his due time would take it off, and use means to take it off, yet I may be well pleased so far as God's hand is in it. To be well pleased with God's hand, that is a higher degree than the other, and this comes from hence, not only because I see that I should be content in this affliction, but because I see that there is good in this affliction. I find there is honey in this rock, and so I do not only say, I must, or I will submit to God's hand. No, but the hand of God is good; it is good that I am afflicted. That it is just that I am afflicted, that may be in one that is not truly contented; I may be convinced that God deals justly in this: God is righteous and just, and it is fit I should submit to what he has done; oh! the Lord has done righteously in all his ways, but that is not enough, but you must say, "Good is the hand of the Lord," the expression of old Eli; "Good is the word of the Lord," (1 Sam. 3:18) when it was a sore and hard word, that word that did threaten very grievous things to Eli and his house, and yet, "Good is the word of

the Lord,” says Eli. Perhaps some of you may say as David, “It is good that I was afflicted” (Ps. 119:71). Nay, you must come to say thus, ‘It is good that I am afflicted.’ Not good when you see the good fruit that it has wrought, but, when you are afflicted, to say, ‘It is good that I am afflicted.’ Whatever the affliction be, yet through the mercy of God my condition is a good condition; it is the top, indeed, and the height of this art of contentment to come to this pitch, to be able to say, ‘Well, my condition and afflictions are thus and thus, and is very grievous and sore, yet I am through God’s mercy in a good condition, and the hand of God is good upon me, notwithstanding.’

Now, I should have given you divers scriptures about this; I shall but give you one or two that are very remarkable; you will think this is a hard lesson to come thus far, not only to be quiet, but to have a complacency in affliction: “In the house of the righteous is much treasure, but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble” (Prov. 15:6). Here is a scripture now that will show that a gracious heart has cause to say it is in a good condition whatever it be. In the house of the righteous is much treasure; his house, what house? It may be a poor cottage. Perhaps he has scarcely a stool to sit on; perhaps he is fain to sit upon a stump of wood, a piece of a block, instead of a stool; or perhaps he has scarcely a bed to lie upon, or a dish to eat in, yet says the Holy Ghost, “In the house of the righteous is much treasure.” Let the righteous man be the poorest man in the world; it may be there are some that have come and taken all the goods out of his house for debt; perhaps his house is plundered and all is gone, yet still, “In the house of the righteous is much treasure.” The righteous man can never be brought to be so poor to have his house rifled and spoiled, but there will remain much treasure within if he has but a dish or a spoon or anything in the world in his house, there will be much treasure; so long as he is there, there is the presence of God and the blessing of God upon him, and therein is much treasure, but in the revenues of the wicked there is trouble. There is more treasure in the poorest man’s house if he be godly than in the house of

the greatest man in the world that has his brave hangings, and brave wrought beds, and chairs and couches, and cupboards of plate, and the like: whatever he has, he has not so much treasure in it, as in the house of the poorest righteous soul.

Therefore, in a verse or two after my text, no marvel though St. Paul says he was content, you shall see that, "But I have all, and I abound, I am full" (Phil. 4:18). I have all. Alas, poor man, what had St. Paul, that could make him say he had all? Where was there ever man more afflicted than St. Paul was? Many times he had not tatters to hang about his body, to cover his nakedness; he had not bread to eat; he was often in nakedness, and put in the stocks, and whipped, and cruelly used, "yet I have all," says St. Paul for all that you have plainly stated in 2 Cor. 6:10. He professes there that "he did possess all things; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." But mark what he says. It is, "As having nothing, but it is possessing all things"; he does not say, "As possessing all things, but possessing all things"; it is very little I have in the world, but yet possessing all things. So that you see a Christian has cause to take complacency in God's hand, whatsoever his hand be.

## CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, VIII

*It submits to God's disposal*

The next thing in contentment is that it is in God's disposal. That is, the soul that has learned this lesson of contentment looks up to God in all things, looks not down to the instruments or the means, as, 'Such a man did it, and it was unreasonableness of such and such instruments, and the like barbarous usage of such and such,' but looks up to God. A contented heart looks to God's disposal, and submits to God's disposal, that is, sees the wisdom of God in all; in his submission sees his sovereignty, but that makes him take complacency; it is God's wisdom. The Lord knows how to order things better than I; the Lord sees further than I do; I see things but at present, but the Lord sees a great while hence, and how do I know, but had it not been for this affliction, I had been undone? I know that the love of God may as well stand with an afflicted estate as with a prosperous estate, and such kind of reasonings there are in a contented spirit, submitting unto the disposal of God.

# CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT DESCRIBED, IX

*In every condition*

**T**he last thing is this in every condition. It may be in some things you could be content. You shall have many will say, 'If my affliction were but as the affliction of such a one, I could be content'; yea, but it must be in the present affliction that is upon you. We use to say, 'There is a great deal of deceit in universals'; in the general, come to any man or woman, and say, 'Will you not be content with God's disposal?' 'Yes,' say they: 'God forbid but we should submit to God's hand!' Whatever it be, you say thus in the general. It is an easy matter to learn this lesson, but when it comes to the particular, when the cross comes sore indeed, when it strikes you in the heaviest cross that you think could befall you, what says your heart now? Can you in every condition be content not only for the matter, but for time? That is, to be in such a condition so long as God would have you, to be content to be at God's time in that condition, to have such an affliction so long as God would have the affliction abide upon you, to be willing to stay, and not to come out of the affliction any sooner than the Lord would have you come out of it? You are not content in your condition else; to be content merely that I



have such a hand of God upon me, and not to stay under the hand of God, that is, not to be content under every condition, but when I can find my heart submitting to God's dispose in such particular afflictions that are very hard and very grievous, and yet my heart is quiet, here is one that has learned the lesson of contentment. Contentment is the inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, freely submitting to and taking complacency in God's disposal in every condition: that is the description. Now in this there has been nine several things opened.

Now, those of you that have learned to be content have learned to attain unto these nine several things; the very opening of these things I hope may so far work upon your hearts as that you may lay your hands upon your hearts upon this that has been said. The very telling of you what the lesson is, I say, may cause you to lay your hands upon your hearts, and say, 'Lord, I see there is more in Christian contentment than I thought there was, and I have been far from learning this lesson; I indeed have learned but my ABCs in this lesson of contentment, I am but in the lower form in Christ's school, if I am in it at all,' but these we shall speak to more afterward. But the special thing I aimed at in the opening of this point is to show how great a mystery there is in Christian contentment, and how many several lessons are to be learned, that we may come to attain to this heavenly disposition that St. Paul did attain to.

## SERMON II

*At Stepney, August 3, 1645*

**W**e have made entrance, you may remember, into the argument of Christian contentment; and have opened the words, and showed you what this Christian contentment is, that is, the inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, freely submitting to and taking complacency in God's disposal in every condition, and therein came to this last thing, "In every condition." Now we shall a little enlarge that, and so proceed.

1. Submitting to God in whatever affliction befalls us, for the kind,
2. For the time and continuance of the affliction.

3. For the variety and changes of affliction. Let them be what they will, yet there must be a submitting to God's disposal in every condition.

1. For the kind. Many men and women will in general say that they must submit to God in affliction. I suppose now, if you should come from one end of this congregation to another, and speak to every soul thus, would you submit to God's disposal, in whatever condition he should dispose of you to? You would say, 'God forbid it should be otherwise,' but we use to say, 'There is a great deceit in generals.' In general, you would submit to anything, but what if it be in this and that

particular that is most cross to you? Then, 'Anything but that!' We are usually apt to think that any condition is better than the condition that God does dispose us to. Now, here is not contentment; it should not be only to any condition in general, but for the kind of affliction, if it be that which is most cross to you. God, it may be, strikes you in your child. 'Oh, if it had been in my estate,' says one, 'I should be content'. Perhaps, he strikes you in your match; 'Oh,' says he, 'I had 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, I would not have cared'. But we must not be our own carvers: what particular afflictions God shall dispose us to, there must be contentment in them.

2. There must be a submission to God in every affliction, for the time and continuance of the affliction. 'It may be,' says one, 'I could submit and be content, but this affliction has been upon me a long time, a quarter of a year, a year, divers years, I know not how to yield and submit to it; my patience is even worn and broken.' Yea, it may be it is a spiritual affliction. You could submit to God, you say, in any outward affliction, but not in a soul affliction; or if it were an affliction upon the soul, trouble upon the heart, if it were the withdrawing of God's face, yet if this had been but for a little time, I could submit; but seeking of God so long a time, and yet God does not appear, oh how shall I bear this! We must not be our own disposers for the time of deliverance anymore than the kind and way of deliverance, and I will give you a scripture or two about this. That we are to submit unto God for the time as well as the kind, in the latter end of the first chapter of Ezekiel, "When I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke."

The prophet was cast down upon his face, but how long must he lie upon his face? "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak unto you, and the Spirit entered into me, when he spoke unto me, and set me upon my feet" (Ezek. 2:12). Ezekiel was cast down upon his face, and there he must lie till God bid him stand up; yea, and not only so, but till God's Spirit came into him, to enable

him to stand up. So, when God casts us down, we must be content to lie till God bids us stand up, and God's Spirit enter into us, to enable us to stand up. So, you know, Noah was put into the ark. Certainly he knew there was much affliction in the ark, having all kind of creatures shut up with him for twelve months together; it was a mighty thing, yet, God shutting him up, though the waters were assuaged, Noah was not to come out of the ark till God bade him; so, though we be shut up in great affliction, and we may think there may be this and that and the other means to come out of that affliction, yet, till God does open the door, we should be willing to stay. God has put us in, and God is to bring us out. As we read in the Acts, of St. Paul, when they had shut him in prison and would have sent him out; "Nay," says St. Paul, "they shut us in, let them come and fetch us out." So in a holy gracious way should a soul say, 'Well, this affliction that I am brought into, it is by the hand of God, and I am content to be here till God brings me out himself.' God does require at our hands that we should not be willing to come out till he comes and fetches us out.

In Joshua 4:10, you have a notable history there, that may very well serve our purpose: we read of the priests, that the priests bore the ark, and stood in the midst of Jordan: you know, when the children of Israel went into the land of Canaan, they went through the river of Jordan. Now the going through the river of Jordan was a very dangerous thing; only God bade them to go, they might have been afraid that the water might have come in upon them: but mark, it is said, "The priests that bore the ark stood in the midst of Jordan till every thing was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua, and the people hastened and passed over, and it came to pass when all the people were clean passed over that the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests in the presence of the people." Now it was God's disposal that all the people should pass over first, that they should be safe upon the land, but the priests, they must stand still till all the people be passed over, and then they must

have leave to go; but they must stay till God would have them go, stay in all that danger, for certainly in reason and sense there was a great deal of danger in staying, for the text says the people hasted over, but the priests they must stay till the people be gone. Stay till God calls them out from that place of danger. And so many times it does prove that God is pleased to dispose of things, so that the ministers must stay longer in danger than the people, and magistrates, and those in public place, which should make people to be satisfied and contented with a lower condition that God has put them into. Though your condition be low, yet you are not in that danger that those are in that are in a higher condition. God calls them in public place to stand longer in the gap, or place of danger, than other people, but we must be content to stay, even in Jordan, till the Lord shall be pleased to call us out.

3. And then for the variety of our condition, we must be content with the particular affliction, and the times and all the circumstances about the affliction; for sometimes the circumstances are greater afflictions than the afflictions themselves, and for the variety, if God will exercise us with various afflictions, one after another. As that has been very observable, even of late, that many that have been plundered and come away afterwards have fallen sick and died. They have fled for their lives, and afterwards the plague has come among them, and, if not that affliction, it may be some other affliction. It is very rare that one affliction comes alone; commonly, afflictions are not single things, but they come one upon the neck of another. It may be, God strikes one in his estate, then in his body, then in his name, wife, or child, or dear friend; and so the affliction comes in various ways. It is the way of God ordinarily, you may find it by experience, that seldom one affliction comes alone: now this is hard, when one affliction follows after another, when there is a variety of afflictions, when there is a mighty change in a condition: up and down this way and that way. There, indeed, is the trial of a Christian; there must be a submission to God's disposal in them. I remember it is said even of Cato, who was an heathen, that no man saw

him to be changed, though he lived in a time when the commonwealth was so often changed, yet, it is said of him, he was the same, though his condition was changed, and he run through variety of conditions. Oh that it could be said so of many Christians that, though their conditions are changed, yet that nobody could see them changed; they are the same. Look, what gracious, sweet, and holy temper they were in before that they are in still! Thus we are to submit to the disposal of God in every condition.

*Obj. But you will say, this that you speak of is good indeed, if we could attain to it, but is it possible for one to attain to this?*

*Ans.* It is. If you get skill in the art of it, you may attain to it, and it will prove to be no such difficult thing to you neither, if you understand but the mystery of it: as there are many things that men do in their callings, that, if a countryman comes and sees, he thinks it is a mighty hard thing, and that he should never be able to do it, but that is because he understands not the art of it; there is a turning of the hand, so as you may do it with ease. Now, that is the business of this exercise, to open unto you the art and mystery of contentment: what way a Christian comes to contentment, there is a great mystery and art in it; by that which has been opened to you, there will appear some mystery and art, as that a man should be content with his affliction, and yet be sensible of his affliction too. To be thoroughly sensible of an affliction, and to endeavor the removing of it by all lawful means, and yet to be content, there is a mystery in that, how to join these two together: to be sensible of an affliction, as much as that man or woman that is not content. I am sensible of it, as fully as they, and I seek ways to be delivered from it as well as they, and yet, still my heart abides content. This is, I say, a mystery that is very hard to be understood by a carnal heart. But grace does teach such a mixture, does teach us how to make mixture of sorrow and a mixture of joy together, and that makes contentment, the mingling of joy and sorrow, of gracious joy and gracious sorrow together. Grace

teaches us how to moderate, and to order an affliction, so as there shall be a sense of it, and yet, for all that, contentment under it.

## CONTENTMENT A MYSTERY, I

*A Christian is content, yet unsatisfied*

**T**here are divers things further for the opening of the mystery of contentment.

I. The first thing is this, to show that there is a great mystery in it. One that is contented in a Christian way, it may be said of him, that he is the most contented man in the world, and yet the most unsatisfied man in the world; these two together must needs be mysterious. I say, a contented man, as he is the most contented, so he is the most unsatisfied of any man in the world. You never learned the mystery of contentment, except it may be said of you that, as you are the most contented man, so you are the most unsatisfied man in the world.

You will say, 'How is that?' A man that 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. He is contented if he has but a crust, but bread and water, that is, if God dispose of him for the things of the world, to have but bread and water for his present condition; yet, if God should give unto him kingdoms and empires, all the world to rule for his portion, he would not be satisfied with that. Here is the mystery of it, though his heart be



so enlarged as the enjoyment of all the world and ten thousand worlds cannot satisfy him for his portion, yet he has a heart quieted under God's disposal, if he give him but bread and water; to join these two together, this must needs be a great art and mystery. Though he be contented with God in a little, yet, those things that would content other men will not content him. The men of the world seek after estates, and think if they had thus much, and thus much, they would be content: they aim at no great matters. 'But if I had,' perhaps some man thinks, 'but two or three hundred a year, then I should be well enough'; 'if I had but a hundred a year, or a thousand a year,' says another, 'then I should be satisfied'. But, says a gracious heart, if he had ten hundred thousand times so much a year, it would not satisfy him; if he had the quintessence of all the excellences of all the creatures in the world, it could not satisfy him; yet this man can sing and be merry and joyful when he has but a crust of bread and a little water in the world. Surely religion is a great mystery; great is the mystery of godliness, not only in the doctrinal part of it, but in the practical part of it also. Godliness teaches us this mystery: not to be satisfied with all the world for our portion, and yet to be content with the meanest condition in which we are. As Luther, when he had great gifts sent him from dukes and princes, he refused them, and said, "I did vehemently protest God should not put me off so; it is not that which will content me." A little in the world will content a Christian for his passage.

Mark, here lies the mystery of it. A little in the world will content a Christian for his passage, but all the world, and ten thousand times more, will not content a Christian for his portion. Now, a carnal heart will be content with these things of the world for his portion, and there is the difference between a carnal heart and a gracious heart. 'But,' says a gracious heart, 'Lord, do with me what you will for my passage through this world, I will be content with that; but I cannot be content with all the world for my portion.' So there is the mystery of true contentment. A contented man, though he be the most contented with the

least things in the world, yet he is the most unsatisfied man that lives in the world. That soul which is capable of God can be filled with nothing else but God; nothing but God can fill a soul that is capable of God, though a gracious heart knows that it is capable of God and was made for God. A carnal heart thinks of no reference to God, but a gracious heart, being enlarged to be capable of God and enjoying somewhat of him, nothing in the world can fill it, but only God himself. And therefore you shall observe that, let God give what he will to a gracious heart, a heart that is godly, except he gives himself, it will not do; a godly heart will not only have the mercy but the God of that mercy, as well as itself, and then a little matter is enough in the world, if so be it, he has the God of that mercy he does enjoy. I shall need go no further to show a notable scripture for this than Phil. 4:7, 9. Compare verse 7 with verse 9. "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ." "The peace of God shall keep your heart." Then, in verse 9, "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." "The peace of God shall keep you," and "the God of peace shall be with you." This is that which I would observe from the text, that 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 be 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, but I must have the peace of God. But suppose you have the peace of God, will not that quiet you? No, I must have the God of peace; as the peace of God, so the God of peace; that is, I must enjoy that God who gives me the peace. I must have the Cause as well as the effect. I must see from whence my peace comes, and enjoy the Fountain of my peace, as well as the stream of my peace. And so in other mercies: have I health from God? I must have the God of my health to be my portion, or else I am not satisfied. It is not life, but the God of my life; it

is not the riches, but the God of those riches, that I must have; the God of my preservation, as well as my preservation; a gracious heart is not satisfied without this; to have the God of the mercy, as well as the mercy: "Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides you" (Ps. 73:25). It is nothing in heaven or earth can satisfy me, but yourself; if God give you not only earth but heaven, that you should rule over sun, moon, and stars, and have rule over the highest of the sons of men, it would not be enough to satisfy you, except you had God himself. There lies the first mystery of contentment, and truly a contented man, though he be the most contented man in the world, yet he is the most unsatisfied man in the world; that is, those things which will satisfy the world will not satisfy him.

## CONTENTMENT A MYSTERY, II

*A Christian comes to contentment by subtraction*

There is this mystery in Christian contentment: a Christian comes to contentment, not so much by way of addition as by way of subtraction; this is his way of contentment, and that is a way that the world has no skill in. I open it thus, not so much by the adding to what he would have, or to what he has, not by adding more to his condition, but rather by subtracting his desires, and so to make his desires and condition to be even and equal. A carnal heart knows no way to be contented but this: 'I have such and such an estate, and if I had this added to it, and the other comfort added that now I have not, then I should be contented. It may be I have lost my estate, if I could have but that given to me, so as to make up my loss, then I should be a contented man.' But now contentment does not come in that way; it comes not in, I say, by the adding to what you want, but by the subtracting of your desires. It is all one to a Christian, either that I may get up into what I would have, or get my desires down to what I have; either that I may attain to what I do desire, or bring down my desires to what I have already attained. My estate is the same, for it is as suitable to me to bring my desire down to my condition as it is to raise up my condition to my desire. Now I say, a

heart that has no grace and is not instructed in this mystery of contentment knows no way to get contentment, but to have his estate raised up to his desires, but the other has another way to contentment, that is, he can bring his desire down to his estate, and so he does attain to his contentment. So the Lord fashions the hearts of the children of men: now, if the heart of a man be fashioned to his condition, he may have as much contentment as if his condition be fashioned to his heart. Some men have a mighty large heart, but they have a strait condition, and they can never have contentment when their hearts are big, and their condition is little; but now, though a man cannot bring his condition to be as big as his heart, yet if he can bring his heart to be as little as his condition, to bring them even from thence is contentment. The world is infinitely deceived in this, to think that contentment lies in having more than they have; here lies the foundation and root of all contentment, when there is an evenness and proportion between our hearts and our condition, and that is the reason why many who are godly men in a low condition, live more sweet and comfortable lives than those who are richer. Contentment is not always clothed with silk and purple and velvets, but contentment is sometimes in a russet suit, in a mean condition as well as a higher; and many men that sometimes have had great estates, and God has brought them into a lower condition, they have had more contentment in that condition than in the other.

Now, how can that possibly be thus easily? For if you did but understand the root of contentment, it consists in the suitableness and proportion of the spirit of a man to his estate, and the evenness, when one end is not longer and bigger than another: the heart is contented, there is comfort in that condition. Now, let God give a man ever so great riches, yet if the Lord give him up to the pride of his heart, he will never be contented. But now let God bring anyone into a mean condition, and then let God but fashion and suit his heart to that condition, and he will be content. As now in a man's going, suppose a man had a mighty long leg, and his other leg were short, why, though one of his

legs be longer than ordinary, yet he could not go so well as a man that has both his legs shorter than he. I compare a long leg, when one is longer than another, to a man that has a high condition, and is very rich, and a great man in the world, but he has a great proud heart too, that is longer and larger than his condition: now, this man cannot but be troubled in his condition. Now, another man that is in a mean condition, his condition is low, and his heart is low too, so that his heart and his condition are both even together, and this man goes on with more ease abundantly than the other does. A gracious heart works after this manner: the Lord has been pleased to bring down my condition; now, if the Lord bring down my heart and make it even with my condition, then I am well enough. And so when God brings down his condition, he does not so much labor to raise up his condition again as to bring down his heart to his condition. The heathens themselves had a little glimpse of this; they could say that the best of all riches is the poverty of desires: that is a speech of a heathen, if a man or woman have their desires cut short, and have no large desires, that man or woman is rich when they can bring their desires to be but low. So this is the art of contentment: not to seek to add to our conditions, but to subtract from our desires. Another has this; 'the way to be rich,' says he, it is not by increasing of wealth, but by diminishing of our desires; for certainly that man or woman is a rich man or woman that has their desires satisfied. Now, a contented man has his desires satisfied; God satisfies his desires, that is, all considered, he is satisfied in his condition for the present to be the best condition, and so he comes to this contentment by way of subtraction and not addition.

## CONTENTMENT A MYSTERY, III

*By adding another burden to that he has*

**T**he third thing in the art of contentment is this: “A Christian comes to contentment, not so much by getting off his burden that is upon him, as by the adding another burden to him.” This is a way that flesh and blood has little skill in. You will say, ‘How is this?’ In this manner are you afflicted, and is there a great load and burden upon you by reason of your affliction? You think there is no way in the world to get contentment, but O that this burden were but off! O it is a heavy load, and few know what a burden I have! What? Do you think there is no way for the contentment of your spirit but this getting off your burden? O you are deceived: the way of contentment is to add another burden, that is, labor to load and burden your heart with your sin, and the heavier the burden of your sin is to your heart, the lighter will the burden of your affliction be to your soul, and so shall you come to be content. If your burden were lightened, that would content you. You think there is no way to lighten it, but to get it off, but you are deceived; for if you can get your heart to be more burdened with your sin, you will be less burdened with your afflictions. You will say, this is a strange way, for a man or woman to get ease to their condition when

they are burdened, to lay a greater burden upon them! You think there is no other way when you are afflicted, but to be jolly and merry, and get into company. Oh no; you are deceived, your burden will come again. Alas! This is a poor way to get his spirit quieted, poor man, the burden will be upon him again. But if you would have your burden light, if you can get alone and examine your heart for your sin and charge your soul with your sin; if your burden be in your estate, for the abuse of it, or if it be a burden upon your body, for the abuse of your health, and strength, and the abuse of any mercies that now the Lord has taken away from you, you have not honored God with those mercies that you have had, but you have walked wantonly and carelessly, and so fall a bemoaning your sin before the Lord, and you shall quickly find the burden of your affliction to be lighter than it was before. Do but try this piece of skill and art, to get your soul contented with any low condition that God has put you into. Many times in a family, when any affliction befalls them, O what a deal of discontentment is there between man and wife, if crossed in their estates at land, or ill news from sea, or those that they trusted are broke, and the like, and perhaps somewhat in the family falls cross between man and wife, or in reference to the children or servants, and there is nothing but clamor and discontent among them.

Now, they many times are burdened with their own discontent, and, perhaps, will say one to another, 'This life is very uncomfortable for us to live thus discontented, so as we do!' But have you ever tried this way, the husband and the wife? Have you ever got alone, and said, 'Come, O let us go, and humble ourselves before God together; let us go into our chamber, and humble our souls before God for our sin, whereby we have abused those mercies that God has taken away from us, and we have provoked God against us. O let us charge ourselves with our sin, and be humbled before the Lord together.' Have you tried such a way as this is? Oh, you would find the cloud would be taken away, and the sun would shine in upon you, and you would have a great deal more contentment than ever yet you had. If a man's estate be broken, either



by plunderers, or any other way, now, how shall this man have contentment? How! By the breaking of his heart; God has broken your estate, O seek to him for the breaking of your heart likewise. Indeed a broken estate, and a whole heart, a hard heart, will not join together, there will be no contentment, but a broken estate, and a broken heart, will so suit together. As there will be more contentment than there was before, add therefore to the breaking of your estate, the breaking of your heart what you can, and that is the way to be contented in a Christian manner, which is the third mystery in Christian contentment.