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CONTENTMENT

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WHAT IS CONTENTMENT?

William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

OUR libraries abound with treatises on *contentment*. Some of them are written with great ability. Nor has there ever been much formal disputation among writers on morals respecting the obligation and excellence of this attainment. It produces results so happy and is enforced by so many urgent reasons that a man must be particularly blinded before he can regard discontent as either lawful or slightly criminal. The difficulty therefore is not so much in the want¹ of good rules and strong reasons for guiding us into a state of contentment, as in the deep-rooted aversion² of our hearts to a duty that requires our submission to the will of God. We *know* better than we *do*. Seeing the right, we pursue the wrong. We smile at the folly or frown at the wickedness of discontent in others, and then follow their example.

But what is contentment? And how may it be known from evil states of mind somewhat resembling it? Contentment is not carelessness or prodigality.³ It is not obtuseness of sensibility.⁴ It is a disposition of mind in which we rest satisfied with the will of God respecting our temporal affairs—without hard thoughts or hard speeches concerning His allotments⁵ and without any sinful desire for a change. It submissively receives what is given. It thankfully enjoys present mercies. It leaves the future in the hand of unerring wisdom. Nor is there anything in true contentment to make men satisfied with the world as a portion or as a permanent abode. The most contented person may long for the day when Christ shall call him home. He may, like Paul, be in a strait betwixt two, not knowing whether to desire to abide in the flesh for the sake of others or to depart and be with Christ, which is far better (Phi 1:23)...

We may form some correct idea of contentment by considering its opposites: of these, one of the most prominent is *envy*. There is not a more vile or a more violent passion. It is full of deadly malice. When a man's heart grows sick at the superior worldly success of others and hates them on that account, he is not far from ruin...If thine eye is evil towards thy neighbor because God is good to him, it is proof that thou quarrelest with Providence. This is the more inexcusable because God has expressly informed us that men of the world have their portion in this life. He has provided for His friends a portion better than was ever enjoyed on earth by any man, even by Adam before his fall. And if God should give to one of His children more than He gives to you, has He not a right to do what He will with His own?

Contentment is also opposed to *corroding care about our worldly condition*. The command of the New Testament is, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phi 4:6). Similar to this is the exhortation, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1Pe 5:7). To the same purpose spoke our Lord: "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?" (Mat 6:25). It is of the greatest importance to our peace and usefulness that we settle it in our minds that all fretting care⁶ about the things of this life is both a sin and a folly. It is to these immoderate cares that our Lord refers when He says, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luk 21:34)...

Contentment is opposed to *covetousness*. There are two words in the Greek Testament that may be rendered *covetousness*. The one literally signifies the love of money; the other [is] a desire of more, rendered *greediness* in Ephesians 4:19. These two senses are coincident,⁷ for no man desires more of that which he does not love. As he that loveth silver cannot be satisfied with the silver that he already possesses, he will of course desire more. To

¹ want – lack.

² aversion – feeling of intense dislike.

³ prodigality – reckless extravagance in spending; wastefulness.

⁴ obtuseness...sensibility – dullness in the ability to understand or to perceive.

⁵ allotments – portions or shares of things given.

⁶ fretting care – worried or burdened states of mind arising from fear or doubt.

⁷ coincident – in exact agreement.

both of these, contentment is the opposite. It loves not inordinately⁸ what it has nor is greedy for more. So says the Scripture, “Let your conversation”—*your life, your behavior*—“be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have” (Heb 13:5). “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1Ti 6:8)...It is as impossible to remove the restlessness of a covetous mind by heaping wealth upon it, as [it is] to extinguish fire by pouring oil upon it. It is a great thing to learn that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luk 12:15). So that “If a man is not content in the state he is in, he will not be content in any state he would be in”⁹...“Take heed, and beware of covetousness” (Luk 12:15).

Contentment is also the opposite of pride. “Humility is the mother of contentment...They that deserve *nothing* should be content with *anything*.”¹⁰ When we become lifted up with pride and think we deserve something good at God’s hands, it is impossible to satisfy us. But with the lowly is wisdom, quietness, gentleness, contentment. He who expects nothing because he deserves nothing is sure to be satisfied with the treatment he receives at God’s hands. So that “a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked” (Psa 37:16). For “the wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God” (Psa 10:4). The proud is like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. He is turbulent and fiery. He alienates friends; he makes enemies. He has much trouble and sorrow where the humble pass quietly along. Pride and contentment do not go together.

Neither do contentment and ambition at all agree. “And seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not” (Jer 45:5). Our actual wants are not many; but the ambitious create a thousand demands [that are] hard, if not impossible, to meet. If men are bent on gratifying the strong desires of a wicked ambition, it will require more resources than any mortal possesses to meet the half of them. If a wise man cannot bring his condition to his mind, he will honestly endeavor to bring his mind to his condition.¹¹ But the ambitious will not do this. He will be content with nothing gained because each elevation widens his horizon and gives him a view of something else that he greatly longs for, so he is tossed from vanity to vanity, a stranger to solid peace. *Art thou ambitious?* Then thou art thine own tormentor.

Contentment is opposed to murmurings and repinings against God’s providence and dwells with her sisters gratitude, submission, and resignation.¹² Like Hezekiah, she exclaims concerning all God’s orderings, “Good is the word of the Lord” (Isa 39:8). This is a great point! If you can say nothing clearly to the glory of God, it is wise to be dumb¹³ and not open your mouth (Psa 38:13; 39:2).

Contentment is also opposed to distrust of God and to despondency respecting the orderings of His providence. Instead of waiting on the Lord and relying on Him for strength of heart, how many forebode ill¹⁴ from all that occurs to them or is anticipated by them. They have little if any cheerfulness. Their souls are never as Mount Zion, “which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever” (Psa 125:1)...True contentment...will settle, confirm, and establish the soul...

Contentment is a most reasonable duty. It is best that *your* will should not control your affairs. Your health, ease, success, wealth, reputation, and enjoyment deeply concern you: but are you fit to direct respecting them? If God should give you your way, how much would satisfy you? Would not your desires soon be drowned in cares, crimes, and sorrows? Is it best for you to have uninterrupted health? Without *some* bodily pain, you might forget that you were mortal! It would be more painful to a truly pious man to say when, how long, and how severely he should be sick than it would be to be sick all his life. A greater name than you now have might be your downfall. More ease might subject you to dreadful diseases. Make not your lot worse by sinful repinings.¹⁵

You have not shown wisdom sufficient to direct any of your own affairs. It is a mercy to us all that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). Human knowledge is ignorance, human prudence folly, human strength weakness, human virtue a slender reed. God may cross you without doing you any injustice. Your will is the will of a sinner. Sometimes God has tried you by gratifying your desires for something new, something

⁸ **inordinately** – excessively.

⁹ *Select Remains of the Rev. John Mason* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1830), 38.

¹⁰ *Remains*, 38.

¹¹ *Remains*, 38.

¹² **resignation** – giving oneself up to God.

¹³ **dumb** – speechless; silent.

¹⁴ **forebode ill** – predict misfortune or destruction.

¹⁵ **repinings** – expressions of discontent.

different. The result generally has not been favorable: “I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath” (Hos 13:11). You have often done worse when full than when empty: “But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked” (Deu 32:15). Good Hezekiah greatly desired life, and God gave him fifteen years more. But in that time, he greatly erred and left a sad blot on his name. A man may live too long for his own peace, honor, or usefulness. *Your wishes are not always wise.* A child was sick. His mother was almost frantic. She fasted, she fainted, she wept, she screamed. God restored her boy to health, and at manhood he committed felony, was arrested, imprisoned, convicted, executed, and broke her heart. How much less would she have suffered had he died in childhood? Your views are liable to be full of error.

But God is fit to govern you and all things. He knows what is best for you, how much you can bear, and when a smile or a stroke will do you most good. His grace is great and so are His truth, power, and wisdom. If He directs, all things will go right. He is never deceived or outwitted. He is gentle and kind. “For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psa 103:14). His will is holy, just, and good. He keepeth “mercy for thousands” (Exo 34:7). His faithfulness is unto all generations. You should be glad that Jehovah governs the universe, that He governs *you*. If wise, thou wilt “trust in the LORD, and do good...and verily thou shalt be fed” (Psa 37:3). For He hath said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). What a promise! What a promise!

Learn, in whatever state you are, therewith to be content (Phi 4:11). “You are the *borrower*, not the *owner*” of created comfort.¹⁶ Suppress the first risings of ambition, covetousness, self-will, restlessness, and the spirit of murmuring. Rest quietly in God. The future will bring a full explanation of the present. Treasure up in your heart the blessed promises of God.

Incessantly¹⁷ ask the Lord to increase your faith. Diligently perform all known duties, especially relative duties. “Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart” (Psa 27:14). Say not, “God hath forgotten, or is as a stranger that tarrieth for a night.” Resist all unworthy thoughts of your Savior and heavenly Father. Stand in your lot, and leave results with Him Who governs all things “after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). So shall you walk safely, and light shall be your burden; and soon the Almighty shall call you to Himself, and “the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (Isa 60:20). But until that day of joy shall come, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, remembering that “we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1Ti 6:7).

From *Vital Godliness*, reprinted by Sprinkle Publications, www.sprinklepublications.net.

William Swan Plumer (1802-1880): American Presbyterian minister; prolific author; born in Greensburg, PA.

THE QUIET OF THE HEART

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1647)

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

—*Philippians 4:11*

CONTENTMENT in every condition is a great art, a spiritual mystery. It is to be learned and to be learned as a mystery. And so in verse 12, [Paul] affirms, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed.”

The word that is translated *instructed* is derived from the word that signifies “mystery.” It is just as if he had said, “I have learned the mystery of this business.” Contentment is to be learned as a great mystery, and those who are thoroughly trained in this art, which is like Samson’s riddle to a natural man, have learned a deep mystery...I

¹⁶ Reference to Samuel Rutherford (c.1600-1661), “Of all created comforts, God is the lender; you are the borrower, not the owner.”

¹⁷ **incessantly** – continually; constantly.

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

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 and bearing against God and others: it is the inward submission of the heart. "Truly my soul waiteth upon God" (Psa 62:1), and, "My soul, wait thou only upon God" (62:5). 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 discontent. This shows a complicated disorder and great perversity in their hearts. Notwithstanding their outward silence, God hears the peevish,¹⁸ 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.

Some people are so weak that they cannot restrain the unrest of their spirits; but in words and behavior, they reveal what woeful disturbances there are within. Their spirits are like the raging sea, casting forth nothing but mire and dirt, and are troublesome not only to themselves but to all with whom they live. Others, however, are able to restrain such disorders of heart, as Judas did when he betrayed Christ with a kiss. Even so, they boil inwardly and eat away like a canker.¹⁹ So David speaks of some whose words are sweeter than honey and butter, and yet have war in their hearts. In another place, he says, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old" (Psa 32:3). In the same way these people, while there is a serene calm upon their tongues, have blustering²⁰ storms upon their spirits. And while they keep silence, their hearts are troubled and even worn away with anguish and vexation. They have peace and quiet outwardly, but within [there is] war from the unruly and turbulent²¹ workings of their hearts.

If the attainment of true contentment were as easy as keeping quiet outwardly, it would not need much learning. It might be had with less strength and skill than an apostle possessed, yea, less than an ordinary Christian has or may have. Therefore, there is certainly more to it than can be attained by common gifts and the ordinary power of reason, which often bridle nature. It is a business of the heart.

IT IS THE QUIET OF THE HEART. All is sedate²² and still there...But what then, it will be asked, is this quietness of spirit opposed to?...

To vexing and fretting,²³ which is a degree beyond murmuring. I remember the saying of a heathen: "A wise man may grieve *for*, but not be vexed *with*, his afflictions." There is a vast difference between a kindly grieving and a disordered vexation.

To tumultuousness²⁴ **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. [They] did not know for what purpose they had come together (Act 19:32). 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."²⁵

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. Indeed, a Christian values every service of God so much that though some may be in the eyes of the world and of natural reason a slight and empty business, beggarly elements, or foolishness, yet since God calls for it, the authority of the command so overawes his heart that he is willing to spend himself and to be spent in discharging it. It is an expression of Luther's²⁶ that ordinary works, done *in* faith and *from* faith, are

¹⁸ **peevish** – easily irritated, especially by unimportant things.

¹⁹ **canker** – cancer.

²⁰ **blustering** – raging.

²¹ **turbulent** – characterized by conflict, disorder, confusion; violent commotion.

²² **sedate** – calm, dignified, and unhurried.

²³ **vexing and fretting** – mental anxiety and worrying.

²⁴ **tumultuousness** – emotional disturbance and confusion.

²⁵ **rashly** – recklessly; thoughtlessly.

²⁶ **Martin Luther** (1483–1546) – German Protestant theologian, the leading figure of the German Reformation.

more precious than heaven and earth.²⁷ And if this is so, and a Christian knows it, he should not be diverted by small matters. [He] should answer every distraction 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 cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?” (Neh 6:3).

To distracting, heart-consuming cares. A gracious heart 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). A great man will permit common people to stand outside his doors, but he will not let them come in and make a noise in his closet or bedroom when he deliberately retires from all worldly business. So a well-tempered spirit may enquire after things outside in the world and suffer some ordinary cares and fears to break into the suburbs of the soul, so as to touch lightly upon the thoughts. Yet it will not on any account allow an intrusion into the private room, which should be wholly reserved for Jesus Christ as his inward temple.

To sinking discouragements. When things do not fall out according to expectation, when the tide of second causes runs so low that we see little in outward means to support our hopes and hearts, then the heart begins to reason as he did in 2 Kings 7:2: “If the LORD would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” We never consider that God can open the eyes of the blind with clay and spittle; He can work above, beyond, and even contrary to means. He often makes the fairest flowers of man’s endeavors to wither and brings improbable things to pass in order that the glory of the undertaking may be given to Himself. Indeed, if His people stand in need of miracles to bring about their deliverance, miracles fall as easily from God’s hands as to give His people daily bread. God’s blessing many times is a secret from His servants so that they do not know from which way it is coming. “Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water” (2Ki 3:17). 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. Though an affliction is on you, do not let your heart sink under it. As far as your heart sinks and you are discouraged under affliction, so much you need to learn this lesson of contentment.

To sinful shiftings and shirkings²⁸ to get relief and help. We see this kind of thing in Saul running to the witch of Endor and offering sacrifice before Samuel came. Nay, good King Jehoshaphat joins himself with Ahaziah (2Ch 20:35). Asa goes to Benhadad, king of Syria, for help, not relying upon the Lord (2Ch 16:7-8), though the Lord had delivered the Ethiopian army into his hands consisting of a thousand thousand (2Ch 14:12). Good Jacob joined with his mother in lying to Isaac: not content to await God’s time and use God’s means, he made too great a haste and went out of his way to procure the blessing that God intended for him. 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.” Is it not so many times in some of your hearts, when any cross or affliction befalls you? Do you not experience such workings of spirit as this? “Oh, if I could only be delivered from this affliction in any way, I would not care”—*your hearts are far from being quiet*. This sinful shifting is the next thing that is in opposition to the quietness that God requires in a contented spirit.

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. I hope many of you have learned so far to be content as to restrain your hearts from such disorders. Yet the truth is that not only wicked men, but sometimes the very saints of God find the beginnings of this, when an affliction remains for a long time and is very severe and heavy indeed upon them, and strikes them, as it were, in the master vein. 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. Especially is this the case with those who, besides their corruptions, have a large measure of melancholy. The Devil works both

²⁷ Who can adequately proclaim the usefulness and the effect of even one work that a Christian does in faith and on the basis of faith? It is more precious than heaven and earth. (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 26: *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, Chapters 1-4, 334)

²⁸ **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.

upon the corruptions of their hearts and the melancholy disease²⁹ of their bodies. Though much grace may lie underneath, yet under affliction there may be some risings against God Himself.

Now, Christian quietness is opposed to all these things. When affliction comes, whatever it is, you do not murmur. Though you feel it, though you make your cry to God, though you desire to be delivered and seek it by all good means, yet you do not murmur or repine, you do not fret or vex yourself. There is not a tumultuousness of spirit in you, not an instability. There are not distracting fears in your hearts, no sinking discouragements, no unworthy shifts, no risings in rebellion against God in any way. This is quietness of spirit under an affliction.

From *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, available in
an abridged booklet from Chapel Library.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1647): English Congregationalist Puritan preacher; one of the Independent members of the Westminster Assembly; born in East Anglia, East of England region.

CONTENTMENT: A RARE GRACE

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”—Hebrews 13:5

NOTHING is cheaper than good advice. Everybody fancies he can give his neighbor good counsel and tell him exactly what he ought to do. Yet to practice the lesson that heads this paper is very hard. To talk of contentment in the day of health and prosperity is easy enough; but to be content in the midst of poverty, sickness, trouble, disappointments, and losses is a state of mind to which very few can attain

Let us turn to the Bible and see how it treats this great duty of contentment. Let us mark how the great Apostle of the Gentiles speaks when he would persuade the Hebrew Christians to be content. He backs up his injunction³⁰ by a beautiful motive. He does not say nakedly, “Be content.” He adds words that would ring in the ears of all who read his letter and nerve their hearts³¹ for a struggle: “Be con-tent,” he says, “with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Reader, I see things in this golden sentence, I venture to think, that deserve special notice. Give me your attention for a few minutes, and we will try to find out what they are.

Let us first examine the precept that St. Paul gives us: “Be content with such things as ye have.” These words are very simple. A little child might easily understand them. They contain no high doctrine; they involve no deep metaphysical question;³² and yet, simple as they are, the duty that these words enjoin on us is one of the highest practical importance to all classes.

Contentment is one of the rarest graces. Like all precious things, it is most uncommon. The old Puritan divine,³³ who wrote a book about it, did well to call his book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.³⁴ An Athenian philosopher is said to have gone into the market place at midday with a lantern in order to find out an honest man. I think he would have found it equally difficult to find one quite contented.

²⁹ **melancholy disease** – in Burroughs’s day, melancholy was considered a functional mental disease, characterized by gloomy thoughtfulness, ill-grounded fears, and general depression of mind; it is now called *melancholia*.

³⁰ **injunction** – authoritative order.

³¹ **nerve their hearts** – muster courage or self-control in preparation for something difficult.

³² **metaphysical question** – philosophical first principle such as being, space, time, etc.

³³ **Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1647)** – Congregational preacher and member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. (See previous article.)

³⁴ Available in an abridged booklet from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Before they fell, the fallen angels had heaven itself to dwell in and the immediate presence and favor of God; *but they were not content*. Adam and Eve had the Garden of Eden to live in with a free grant of everything in it excepting one tree; *but they were not content*. Ahab had his throne and kingdom, but so long as Naboth's vineyard was not his, *he was not content*. Haman was the chief favorite of the Persian king; but, so long as Mordecai sat at the gate, *he was not content*.

It is just the same everywhere in the present day. Murmuring, dissatisfaction, discontent with what we have—[these] meet us at every turn. To say with Jacob, “I have enough” (Gen 33:11), seems flatly contrary to the grain of human nature. To say, “I want more,” seems the mother tongue of every child of Adam. Our little ones around our family hearths are daily illustrations of the truth of what I am saying. They learn to ask for “more” much sooner than they learn to be satisfied. They are far more ready to cry for what they want, than to say, “Thank you,” when they have [received] it.

There are few readers of this very paper, I will venture to say, who do not want something or other different from what they have—something more or something less. What you have does not seem as good as what you have not. If you only had this or that thing granted, you fancy you would be quite happy.

Hear now with what power St. Paul's direction ought to come to all our consciences: “Be content,” he says, “with such things as ye have” —not with such things as ye once *used* to have, not with such things as ye *hope* to have, but with such things *as ye have now*. With such things, whatever they may be, we are to be content—with such a dwelling, such a position, such health, such income, such work, such circumstances as we have, we are to be content... To be content is to be rich and well-off. He is the rich man who has no wants and requires no more. I ask not what his income may be. A man may be rich in a cottage and poor in a palace.

To be content is to be independent. He is the independent man who hangs on no created things for comfort and has God for his portion. Such a man is the only one who is always happy. Nothing can come amiss or go wrong with such a man. Afflictions will not shake him, and sickness will not disturb his peace. He can gather grapes from thorns and figs from thistles, for he can get good out of evil. Like Paul and Silas, he will sing in prison with his feet fast in the stocks. Like Peter, he will sleep quietly in prospect of death the very night before his execution. Like Job, he will bless the Lord even when stripped of all his comforts.

Ah! Reader, if you would be truly happy—*who does not want this?*—seek it where alone it can be found. Seek it not in money. Seek it not in pleasure, in friends, or in learning. Seek it in having a will in perfect harmony with the will of God. *Seek it in studying to be content*.

You may say, “It is fine talking: how can we be always content in such a world?” I answer that you need to cast away your pride and know your deserts³⁵ in order to be thankful in any condition. If men really knew that they deserve nothing and are debtors to God's mercy every day, they would soon cease to complain. You may say, perhaps, that you have such crosses, trials, and troubles that it is impossible to be content. I answer that you would do well to remember your ignorance. Do you know best what is good for you or does God? Are you wiser than He is?

The things you want might ruin your soul. The things you have lost might have poisoned you. Remember, Rachel must needs³⁶ have children: she had them and died (Gen 30:1; 35:16-19). Lot must needs live near Sodom, and all his goods were burned. Let these things sink down into your heart.

Let us, in the second place, examine the ground on which St. Paul builds his precept. That ground is one single text of Scripture. It is striking to observe what a small foundation the Apostle seems to lay down when he bids us be content. He holds out no promise of earthly good things and temporal rewards. He simply quotes a verse of God's Word. The Master hath spoken, “He hath said”...

The main point I want to impress on men's minds is this: we ought to make the texts and promises of the Bible our refuge in time of trouble and the fountain of our soul's comfort. When St. Paul wanted to enforce a grace and recommend a duty, he quoted a text. When you and I would give a reason for our hope, or when we feel that we need strength and consolation, we must go to our Bibles and try to find out suitable texts. The lawyer uses old

³⁵ **deserts** – what one deserves with regard to reward or punishment.

³⁶ **needs** – of necessity.

cases and decisions when he pleads his cause. “Such a judge has said such a thing; and therefore,” he argues, “it is a settled point.” The soldier on the battlefield takes up certain positions and does certain things; if you ask him why, he will say, “I have such and such orders from my general, and I obey them.” The true Christian must always use his Bible in like manner. The Bible must be his book of reference and precedents. The Bible must be to him his captain’s orders. If anyone asks him why he thinks as he does, lives as he does, feels as he does, all he has need to reply is, “God has spoken to such an effect: I have my orders, and that is enough.”

Reader, I know not whether I make the point clear; but simple as it seems, it is one of great practical importance. I want you to see the place and office of the Bible, and the unspeakable importance of knowing it well and being acquainted with its contents. I want you to arm yourself with texts and verses of the Bible fastened down in your memory—to read so [that you may] remember and to remember so [that you may] use what you read.

You and I have trouble and sorrow before us. It needs no prophetic eye to see that. Sicknesses, deaths, partings, separations, disappointments are sure to come. What is to sustain us in the days of darkness, which are many? Nothing [is] so able to do it as texts out of the Bible.

You and I, in all probability, may lie for months on a bed of sickness. Heavy days and weary nights, an aching body, and an enfeebled mind may make life a burden. And what will support us? Nothing is likely to cheer and sustain us so much as verses out of the Bible.

You and I have death to look forward to. There will be friends to be left, home to be given up, the grave to be visited, an unknown world to be entered, and the Last Judgment after all. What will sustain and comfort us when our last moments draw nigh? Nothing, I firmly believe, is so able to help our heart in that solemn hour as texts out of the Bible.

I want men to fill their minds with passages of Scripture while they are well and strong that they may have sure help in the day of need. I want them to be diligent in studying their Bibles and becoming familiar with their contents in order that the grand old Book may stand by them and talk with them when all earthly friends fail...I say to every reader: arm yourself with a thorough knowledge of God’s Word. Read it, and be able to say, “I have *hope* because it is thus and thus written. I am not *afraid* because it is thus and thus written.” Happy is that soul who can say with Job, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

Let us examine, [finally], the particular text St. Paul quotes in enforcing the duty of contentment. He tells the Hebrews, “He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” It matters little to what Person in the Trinity we ascribe these words, whether to Father, Son, or Holy Ghost. It all comes to the same in the end. They all are engaged to save man in the Covenant of Grace.³⁷ Each of the three Persons says, as the other two, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

There is great sweetness in this peculiar promise. It deserves close attention. God says to every man or woman who is willing to commit his or her soul to the mercy that is in Christ, “I will never leave thee, and never forsake thee.” I, the eternal Father, the mighty God, the King of kings, “will never leave thee.” The English language fails to give the full meaning of the Greek. It implies, “never—no never—no, nor ever!”

Now, if I know anything of this world, it is a world of “leaving, forsaking, parting, separation, failure, and disappointment.” Think how immense the comfort of finding something that will never leave nor fail.

Earthly good things leave us. Health, money, property, friendship—all make themselves wings and flee away. They are here today and gone tomorrow. But God says, “I will never leave thee.”

We leave one another. We grow up in families full of affections and tender feelings, and then we are all thoroughly scattered. One follows his calling or profession one way, and another in another. We go north, south, east, and west and perhaps meet no more. We meet our nearest friends and relations only at rare intervals, and then to part again. But God says, “I will never leave thee.”

We are left by those we love. They die and diminish, and become fewer and fewer every year. The lovelier—like flowers—the more frail, delicate, and short-lived they seem to be. But God says, “I will never leave thee.”

³⁷ **Covenant of Grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

Separation is the universal law everywhere except between Christ and His people. Death and failure stamp every other thing, but there is none in the love of God to believers.

The closest relation on earth—the marriage bond—has an end. To use the words of the Prayer-book service, it is only “till death us do part.” But the relation between Christ and the sinner that trusts in Him never ends. It lives when the body dies. It lives when flesh and heart fail. Once begun, it never withers. It is only made brighter and stronger by the grave. “I am persuaded,” says St. Paul, “that neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

But this is not all. There is a peculiar depth of wisdom in the words, “I will never leave nor forsake.” Observe, God does not say, “My people shall always have pleasant things. They shall always be fed in green pastures and have no trials—or trials very short and few.” He neither says so, nor does He appoint such a lot to His people. On the contrary, He sends them affliction and chastisement. He tries them by suffering. He purifies them by sorrow. He exercises their faith by disappointments. Still, in all things He promises, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

Let every believer grasp these words and store them up in his heart. Keep them ready and have them fresh in your memory: you will want them one day. The Philistines will be upon you, the hand of sickness will lay you low, the king of terror will draw near, the valley of the shadow of death will open up before your eyes. Then comes the hour when you will find nothing as comforting as a text like this—nothing as cheering as a realizing sense of God’s companionship.

Stick to that word *never*. It is worth its weight in gold. Cling to it as a drowning man clings to a rope. Grasp it firmly as a soldier attacked on all sides grasps his sword. God has said and will stand to it, “I will never leave thee.”

“*Never!*” Though your heart often faints, and you are sick of self and your many failures and infirmities: even then, the promise will not fail.

“*Never!*” Though the devil whispers, “I shall have you at last. Yet a little time and your faith will fail, and you will be mine.” Even then, God will keep His word.

“*Never!*” Though waves of trouble go over your head, and all hope seems taken away. Even then the Word of God will stand.

“*Never!*” When the cold chill of death is creeping over you and friends can do no more, and you are starting on that journey from which there is no return. Even then, Christ will not forsake you.

“*Never!*” When the Day of Judgment³⁸ comes, the books are opened, the dead are rising from their graves, and eternity is beginning—even *then*, the promise will bear all your weight. Christ will not leave His hold on your soul.

Oh, believing reader, trust in the Lord forever, for He says, “I will never leave you.” Lean back all your weight upon Him: do not be afraid. Glory in His promise. Rejoice in the strength of your consolation. You may say boldly, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear” (Heb 13:6).

I conclude this paper with three practical remarks. Consider them well, reader, and lay them to heart:

(1) *Let me tell you why there is so little contentment in the world.* The simple answer is because there is so little grace and true religion. Few know their own sin, few feel their desert, so few are content with such things as they have. Humility, self-knowledge, a clear sight of our own utter vileness and corruption—these are the true roots of contentment.

(2) *Let me show you, secondly, what you should do if you would be content.* You must know your own heart, seek God for your portion, take Christ for your Savior, and use God’s Word for your daily food. Contentment is not to be learned at the feet of Gamaliel, but at the feet of Jesus Christ. He who has God for his friend and heaven for his home can wait for his good things and be content with little here below.

(3) *Let me tell you, lastly, that there is one thing with which we ought never to be content.* That thing is a little religion, a little faith, a little hope, and a little grace. Let us never sit down satisfied with a little of these things. On the

³⁸ See FGB 210 *Day of Judgment*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

contrary, let us seek them more and more...One thing there is which should never satisfy and content us and that is anything that stands between our souls and Christ.

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J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

CONSIDERATION: A GREAT HELP TO CONTENTMENT

Thomas Jacombe (1622-1687)

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

WE are to consider contentment as it imports³⁹ calmness and composedness of mind in every condition—stillness and sedateness⁴⁰ of spirit under all occurrences of providence. When a man likes whatsoever God doeth *to* him or *with* him...this is contentment. There is a great *affinity*,⁴¹ though not a perfect *identity*, between contentment and patience. It is opposed to all vexing, fretting, and murmuring, to all undue perturbations⁴² of mind under God’s dispensations⁴³ toward us, though they be never so cross⁴⁴ to our natural desires. Unquestionably, this was one thing, if not the main thing, intended by our Apostle when he saith, “I have learned in every state to be content.” It is as if he had said “I am brought to this—always to think well of God and of every state into which He is pleased to bring me. Whatever pleases Him pleaseth me, be it imprisonment, poverty, sickness, reproach, death itself. Let God’s will be done, and I am content. I am taught to bear all things with great [steadiness of mind] or evenness of spirit.”

The question then will come to this: “How may we and others get this excellent frame—to have the heart calm and quiet in every state, without being disturbed and discontented under anything that doth befall us?” Resolving this question will be my present work...

It is good advice in Ecclesiastes 7:14, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.” When we meet anything that runs cross to our desires—that makes it a “day of adversity”—did we but sit down and consider the matter, it would much tend to the quieting of our spirits. Consideration is an excellent help to contentment. He who is not thoughtful⁴⁵ will never learn the lesson of the text. Discomposures⁴⁶ of mind are not kept off by spells or charms, but by solid and judicious consideration...Would you know what that special and proper matter is that your consideration is to work upon to further contentment in every state? Then bring it to these three heads: Consider,

Who it is that orders the state: Surely, the supreme, sovereign, all-disposing God. “My times are in thy hands” (Psa 31:15). It is so with every man in the world and with everything *about* every man. All is in God’s hands. There is a Hand *above* that directs all events here *below*. He that numbers our hairs orders our state. Good and evil do not come by chance or happen in a casual and fortuitous⁴⁷ way. Both are disposed⁴⁸ by God’s providence according to

³⁹ **imports** – signifies; means.

⁴⁰ **sedateness** – composure; coolness.

⁴¹ **affinity** – similarity of nature.

⁴² **perturbations** – anxiety.

⁴³ **dispensations** – ordering of things.

⁴⁴ **cross** – contrary; opposite.

⁴⁵ **thoughtful** – inclined to think about or consider matters.

⁴⁶ **discomposures** – disturbances; agitations.

⁴⁷ **fortuitous** – accidental.

⁴⁸ **disposed** – appointed.

His will. This we seem to give a full assent unto, and yet in practice we do either wholly forget it or flatly deny it. My advice, therefore, is this: When at any time your hearts begin to storm and fret at your condition, sit down and seriously consider Who it is that orders that condition. Let your thoughts dwell upon that, and see if it be not to your advantage for the suppressing of all undue perturbations of mind. David tells us, while he “was musing⁴⁹ the fire burned” (Psa 39:3), that is, “the fire of passion,” as many expound it. There is indeed a musing that tends to heart-disquietment: when all our thoughts are taken up in poring⁵⁰ upon that which troubles us. But the musing that I am now urging hath quite another effect. It will *quench* the fire, not kindle it. Methinks that Christian should not easily be disturbed at what befalls him, who considers—let it be what it will—it is all of God...Is it fit for the creature to be angry with God, as Jonah was (Jon 4:9)? Shall man dispute with God? Shall the clay say to the potter, “Why hast thou made me thus?” (Isa 45:9; Rom 9:20). Must Providence be arraigned at our tribunal and *our* will clash with *God’s*? By no means! There is all the reason in the world that whatsoever pleaseth God should please the creature. “It is the LORD,” saith Eli, “let him do what seemeth him good” (1Sa 3:18)...“The LORD gave,” saith Job, “and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). I do not know a more effectual help to stillness of spirit than the consideration of this: *all is ordered by God*...But here in our considering, in order to have the heart smooth and calm, it is good...not only to think that all is ordered by God, but how and in what manner all is ordered by Him. O, this, if duly weighed and digested, would be of great efficacy to further contentment.

Now, take an account of this in four things:

(1) **All is ordered by God *irresistibly*.** “I will work, and who shall let⁵¹ it?” (Isa 43:13). It is applicable to God’s providential dealings with every single person in the world. These are carried on with such a mighty power that it is a vain thing for any to go about to resist and hinder God in what He will do...There is no contending with Him. “Should it be according to thy mind? he will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose” (Job 34:33)...If God bestows it, thou shalt have it. If He withholds it, all thy earnestness and striving will do no good. Or thou wouldest fain⁵² have an affliction removed: [contending with Him] will not do thy work! If God will take it off from thee, there is an end of it. If He will continue it, thou must bear it still. Humble contentment may do much, but proud contending will do *nothing*. God knows what He hath to do, and He will not be hindered in what He sees fit to do. Pray, therefore, whenever passion begins to rise in the soul. Think of this speedily. If it be that the tide of providence will have its course, that there is no hindering of the almighty and sovereign God—“he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him” (Ecc 8:3) and “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11)—then our reason and judgment will tell us that it is best to yield and submit to this God and to comply with that which we cannot alter.

(2) **All is ordered by God *righteously*.** He is righteous, and He doeth nothing but what is righteous. “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25). “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psa 145:17). “Just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Rev 15:3). “Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne” (Psa 97:2)...This is an excellent subject for our thoughts to dwell upon when anything troubles us. Well may there be our contentment in every state when there is God’s righteousness in every state. Providence may sometimes be dark and mysterious, yet it is *always* just and righteous. God may sometimes cross us, but He never *wrongs* us. He doth not see it good in all our desires to gratify us; but it is good for us in all His [dealings with us to declare Him just] (Psa 51:4; Lam 1:18). Doth He remove a mercy that we have not forfeited? Doth He lay on an affliction that we by sin have not deserved? If so, doth it not become us to be silent before Him? “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” (Lam 3:39)...Proverbs 19:3 is a smart passage: “The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.” We provoke God to afflict us, and then we are angry with Him! We have reason only to be angry with *ourselves*, our own sins being the procuring cause of all our miseries. We often have just grounds of being troubled with our own hearts because of their pride, carnality, unthankfulness, unbelief, etc. This is *good* discontent! But we never have *any* just grounds of being disturbed at what God doeth—He is holy and righteous in all His actings. Bring it to this in your consideration: “Such a good I [lack]; such an evil I feel. But is God unrighteous in either? Surely, no. For do I deserve the one, and do I not deserve the other? Why then should I quarrel or fret against God?”...In a word, let

⁴⁹ **mus**ing – absorbed in thought.

⁵⁰ **por**ing – thinking intently.

⁵¹ **let** – hinder; prevent.

⁵² **fain** – eagerly.

this heart-quieting consideration be much upon your thoughts: [God has righteously ordered all; therefore, you must contentedly undergo all.]

(3) All is ordered by God *wisely*...As God at the first made all things with infinite wisdom (Psa 104:24), so He doth also dispose and govern all things with infinite wisdom. This holds true, not only with respect to the whole creation in the general lump and mass thereof, but also with respect to every part of the creation, especially to man...Now, if this was believed and considered, it could not but much conduce⁵³ to make us contented in every condition. Certainly, it must be most absurd folly in us to find fault with or dislike that which God does in admirable wisdom!...Shall we not contentedly rest in what He sees to be fittest and best for us? “For vain man would be wise” (Job 11:12). He thinks he could order things better than God doth! He will be finding faults in God’s disposal of him; but this, his wisdom, is the highest folly. What a wise choice doth God always make for men! The saints shall see it when they go to heaven, if not before. May they not, therefore, quietly resign themselves to Him, saying, “Thou shalt choose our inheritance for us” (Psa 47:4)? On the other hand, what a sad choice men make for themselves, when they will be their own choosers in their discontent! Rachel must have a child or she dies (Gen 30:1). She had her desire, but it cost her life. (Gen 35:16-19). Jacob cannot [await] God’s time for the blessing—in what a world of troubles did he involve himself by [such] hastiness! (Gen 25-28). Poor creature! Thou needest nothing more to undo thee than to be left to choose thy own condition! Didst thou but consider this, wouldest thou not be contented when the wise God chooseth for thee? Reason thus with thyself in secret, “Did God know how to make my person? Doth He not know how to order my condition? He that hath wisdom enough to steer the great vessels of the world and of the Church—hath He not wisdom enough to steer my little boat? He that hath by an unerring providence brought so many saints safe to heaven—doth He not know the best way to bring me safe thither also? Shall He, Who was never guilty of the least mistake in all the works that have passed through His hands, [make a] mistake in *my* case?” I say reason thus, and it is to be hoped this will [calm] all storms of passion. O what a blessed serenity of mind should we have in every state, did we but live in the steady belief and serious consideration of God’s unsearchable wisdom!

(4) All is ordered by God *graciously*. “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.” (Psa 25:10). [Do you have] poverty, pain, sickness, loss of relations, worldly crosses? All is [given] in mercy or [given in order to bestow] mercy to God’s covenant-people...[Afflictions] come *from* God’s love and *for* mercy, God designing good by them and nothing but good to them that love Him. This is a special thing to be thought of by those who belong to God. Others have the sovereignty and righteousness of God to awe them; but saints have the mercy and goodness of God to work their hearts to a quiet submission to His will. And how much is there in this for the furtherance of such a frame of heart in them, could they but draw it out and work it home upon the soul by consideration! What! A child of God [to vex and fret] at this or that, when all is intended for his good and shall be for good to him (according to that great promise, Romans 8:28)? God always knows what is best for His—such is His wisdom! He always doeth what is best for His—such is His mercy! What a heart-composing meditation this is! There is much in the other attributes before mentioned to suppress inward perturbations; but there is more in that which I am now upon. Are mercy and goodness the ingredients in every condition? Then be it never so bitter, the sense of this must sweeten it. Is all ordered in love by a *Father*—not to hurt men, but to do them good? O, why then should I give way to discontent? The truth is, it is too low for the saints in every state *barely* to be content. There is something higher that they should come up to, namely, to “rejoice in the Lord alway” and “in every thing give thanks” (Phi 4:4; 1Th 5:18).

In order to [attain] contentment, the [next thing upon which we must dwell and about which we must employ our thoughts] is *contentment itself*. Consider what a happy and excellent frame it is...Contentment [is]

(1) A gracious frame. It carries much grace in it. It is a holy, good, and gracious temper of soul. [Contentment says that a person has a proper] sense of God in His sovereignty, righteousness, wisdom, goodness, etc. It [says that a person has a proper] sense of what he is in himself—a poor, vile, worthless nothing, “less than the least of all the mercies” of God (Gen 32:10). It [says that a person has properly submitted] his will to the will of his Creator and that he lives in an entire surrender and resignation of himself to the disposal of his Maker. Is this not holy and gracious? Wherein doth grace more show itself than in such things as these? Contentment evidenceth *much* grace, discontentment *much* sin. The former is a compound of several graces, the latter a compound of several sins. In a

⁵³ **conduce** – contribute.

contented frame, there is humility, faith, hope, patience, heavenly-mindedness, crucifixion to the world, etc. In a discontented frame, there is pride, unbelief, impatience, carnality, nay, *practical atheism itself!* The truth is, contentment is better than any comfort that we lack;⁵⁴ discontent is worse than any evil that we feel. No outward enjoyment is comparable to the good of the one; no outward affliction is comparable to the evil of the other.

(2) Highly pleasing to God. It is a frame highly pleasing to God. When a man is once brought to lay himself and all his concerns at God's feet and to say, "It is the Lord. Let Him do with me and mine what seemeth Him good. I will like well whatsoever He doeth"—Oh, *this pleaseth God greatly!* We are well-pleasing to Him, when His providences are well-pleasing to us...Nothing provokes God more than a murmuring and fretful spirit. Nothing pleases Him more than a quiet spirit.

(3) Greatly advantageous to ourselves. The advantages of it to us are very great: (i) *It fills with comfort.* He never lacks comfort that lives contentment. A contented spirit is ever a cheerful spirit. It is a *heaven* upon earth, as the opposite of it is a *hell* upon earth. It is the mind at rest in every condition. A contented man hath not only the comfort of what he hath, but also of what he hath not. What he lacks in outward possession is made up to him in inward submission. (ii) *It fits for duty.* Lord! When the heart is repining⁵⁵ and mutinying against God, how unfit is a man for duty! But when the spirit is still and quiet, all is done well...(iii) *It always procures that very mercy that we desire or some other that is better for us.* Discontent makes us lose what we have; contentment gets us what we lack. Fretting never removed a cross nor procured a comfort: quiet submission doth both. The father continues to correct the froward⁵⁶ child; but when once it yields and is quiet, he gives it anything. (iv) *It sweetens every bitter cup.* This ingredient takes [away] the bitterness of every state, as the wood cast by Moses [took away] the bitterness of the waters. Nothing can come amiss⁵⁷ to him that hath learned to be content.

But to close this head: We are undone for lack of consideration. The world groans under the mischievous effects of inconsideracy... Whence is it that there is amongst men, amongst professors, so little of contentment? That so few have learned in every state to be content? That impatience, repining, quarrelling with God, discontent are so epidemical? That most live in the dislike of their condition? I say, "Whence is this?" I answer, "It is in a great measure from the general neglect of consideration." Could we but bring men to this, contentment would not be so rare a thing as now it is. I do not assert this one means to be sufficient; but believe me, it would go very far.

From "How Christians May Learn in Every State to Be Content"
in *Puritan Sermons, 1659-1689*, Vol. 2, reprinted
by Richard Owen Roberts.

Thomas Jacombe (1622-1687): English Presbyterian minister; a man of exemplary life and great learning; born in Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire.

FULL CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

"And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."—Isaiah 32:2

THERE is provision in Christ for the satisfaction and full contentment of the needy and thirsty soul. This is the sense of those words in the text, "as rivers of water in a dry place"...It is said that Christ is a river of

⁵⁴ The author's original term was *want*.

⁵⁵ **repining** – expressing discontent.

⁵⁶ **froward** – self-willed; difficult to deal with.

⁵⁷ **come amiss** – be contrary to one's expectations.

water because there is such a fullness in Him—so plentiful a provision for the satisfaction of the needy and longing soul. When one is extremely thirsty, though a small draught⁵⁸ of water will not satisfy him, yet when he comes to a river, he finds fullness. There he may drink full draughts. Christ is like a river in that He has sufficiency not only for one thirsty soul; but by supplying him, the fountain is not lessened. There is not less afforded to those who come afterwards. A thirsty man does not sensibly lessen a river by quenching his thirst.

Christ is like a river in another respect: a river is continually flowing. There are fresh supplies of water coming from the fountainhead continually, so that a man may live by it and be supplied with water all his life. So Christ is an ever-flowing fountain. He is continually supplying His people, and the fountain is not spent. They who live upon Christ may have fresh supplies from Him to all eternity. They may have an increase of blessedness that is new, and new still, and that *never* will end.

In illustrating this proposition, I shall inquire, **1. What it is that the soul of every man naturally and necessarily craves.**

First: *The soul of every man necessarily craves happiness.* This is a universal appetite of human nature that is alike in the good and the bad...It is not only natural to all mankind, but to the angels. It is universal among all reasonable, intelligent beings in heaven, earth, or hell because it flows necessarily from an intelligent nature. There is no rational being, *nor can there be any*, without a love and desire for happiness. It is impossible that there should be any creature made that should love misery or not love happiness since it implies a manifest contradiction. The very notion of misery is to be in a state that nature abhors, and the notion of happiness is to be in such a state as is most agreeable to nature. Therefore, this craving of happiness must be insuperable⁵⁹ and can never be changed. It never can be overcome or in any way abated. Young and old, good and bad, wise and unwise love happiness alike, though there is a great variety as to men's ideas of happiness...

Second: *The soul of every man craves a happiness that is equal to the capacity of his nature.* The soul of man is like a vessel: the capacity of the soul is as the largeness or contents of the vessel. Therefore, if man has much pleasure and happiness, but the vessel is not full, the craving will not cease. Every creature is restless until it enjoys what is equal to the capacity of its nature...Man is of such a nature that he is capable of an exceedingly great degree of happiness. He is made of a vastly higher nature than the [animals], and therefore he must have vastly higher happiness to satisfy. The pleasures of the outward senses that content the beasts will not content man. He has other faculties of a higher nature that stand in need of something to fill them. If the senses are satiated,⁶⁰ but the faculties of the soul are not filled, man will be in a craving, restless state.

It is more especially because of the faculty of understanding that the soul is capable of so great a happiness and desires so much. The understanding is an exceedingly extensive faculty.⁶¹ It extends itself beyond the limits of earth, beyond the limits of the creation. As we are capable of understanding immensely more than we do understand, who can tell how far the understanding of men is capable of stretching itself? And as the understanding enlarges, the desire will enlarge with it. It must therefore be an incomprehensible object that must satisfy the soul: it will never be contented with that and that only to which it can see an end. It will never be satisfied with that happiness to which it can find a bottom. A man may seem to take contentment for a little while in a finite object; but after he has had a little experience, he finds that he wants something besides. This is very apparent from the experience of this restless, craving world...

2. Men in their fallen state are in very great lack⁶² of this happiness. They were once in the enjoyment of it, but mankind is sunk to a very low estate. We are naturally poor, destitute creatures. We came naked into the world; and our souls as well as our bodies are in a wretched, miserable condition...The poverty of man in a natural condition appears in his discontented, craving spirit...We are naturally like the prodigal.⁶³ we once were rich, but we departed from our father's house, have squandered away our wealth, and are become poor, hungry, famishing wretches.

⁵⁸ **draught** – the quantity of drink swallowed at one “pull.”

⁵⁹ **insuperable** – impossible to overcome.

⁶⁰ **satiated** – satisfied to the full.

⁶¹ **faculty** – power of the mind.

⁶² The author uses *want* in two senses: 1. *desire* and 2. *lack*. For clarity's sake, the editor has substituted *lack* when the context implies it.

⁶³ **prodigal** – the recklessly wasteful son of Christ's parable, Luke 15:11-32.

Men in a natural condition *may* find something to gratify their senses, but *there is nothing to feed the soul*. That nobler and more essential part perishes for lack of food. They may fare sumptuously⁶⁴ every day, they may pamper their bodies, but the soul cannot be fed from a sumptuous table...The superior faculties want to be supplied as well as the inferior. True poverty and true misery consist in the lack of those things of which our spiritual part stands in need.

3. Those sinners who are thoroughly awakened are sensible of their great need. Multitudes of men are not sensible of their miserable, needy condition. Many are thus poor and think themselves rich and increased in goods. Indeed, no natural men have *true* contentment ...But the thoroughly awakened soul sees that he is very far from true happiness, that those things that he possesses will never make him happy, that for all his outward possessions, he is “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev 3:17). He becomes sensible of the short continuance and uncertainty of those things and of their insufficiency to satisfy a troubled conscience. He wants something else to give him peace and ease. If you would tell him that he might have a kingdom, it would not quiet him. He desires to have his sins pardoned and to be at peace with his Judge. He is poor, and he becomes as a beggar and cries for help. He does not thirst because he sees as yet where true happiness is to be found, but because he sees *that he has it not and cannot find it!* He is without comfort and does not know where to find it, but he longs for it. O, what would he not give, if he could find some satisfying peace and comfort! Such are those hungry, thirsty souls that Christ so often [calls] to Him. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isa 55:1-2). “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink; let him that is athirst come...let him take the water of life freely” (Joh 7:37; Rev 22:17).

4. There is in Christ Jesus provision for the full satisfaction and contentment of such as these.

First: *The excellence of Christ is such that the discovery of it is exceedingly contenting and satisfying to the soul.* The inquiry of the soul is after that which is most excellent. The carnal soul imagines that *earthly* things are excellent: one thinks riches most excellent, another has the highest esteem of honor, and to another carnal pleasure appears the most excellent. But the soul cannot find contentment in any of these things because it soon finds an end to their excellence.

Worldly men imagine that there is true excellence and true happiness in those things that they are pursuing. They think that if they could but obtain them, they should be happy. When they obtain them and cannot find happiness, they look for happiness in something else and are still upon the pursuit.

But Christ Jesus has true excellence, and so great excellence that when they come to see it, they look no further. The mind rests there. It sees a transcendent⁶⁵ glory and an ineffable⁶⁶ sweetness in Him. It sees that until now, it has been pursuing shadows, but that now it has found the substance. Before it had been seeking happiness in the stream, but now it has found the ocean. The excellence of Christ is an object adequate to the natural cravings of the soul and is sufficient to fill the capacity. It is an infinite excellence—such a one as the mind desires—in which it can find no bounds. The more the mind is used to it, the more excellent it appears. Every new discovery makes this beauty appear more ravishing, and the mind sees no end. Here is room enough for the mind to go deeper and deeper and never come to the bottom. The soul is exceedingly ravished when it first looks on this beauty, and it is never weary of it. The mind never has any satiety, but Christ’s excellence is always fresh and new and tends as much to delight after it has been seen a thousand or ten thousand years, as when it was seen the first moment. The excellence of Christ is an object suited to the superior faculties of man: it is suited to entertain the faculty of reason and understanding, and there is nothing so worthy about which the understanding can be employed as this excellence. No other object is so great, noble, and exalted!

This excellence of Jesus Christ is the suitable food of the rational soul. The soul that comes to Christ feeds upon this and lives upon it. It is that bread that came down from heaven, of which he that eats shall not die...It is that wine and milk (Isa 55:1), given without money and without price. This is that fatness in which the believing soul

⁶⁴ **fare sumptuously** – to eat well at great expense.

⁶⁵ **transcendent** – going beyond the ordinary limits of the material universe.

⁶⁶ **ineffable** – indescribable; too great for words.

delights itself. Here the longing soul may be satisfied, and the hungry soul may be filled with goodness. The delight and contentment that are to be found here passeth understanding and are unspeakable and full of glory. It is impossible for those who have tasted of this fountain and know the sweetness of it ever to forsake it. The soul has found the river of water of life, and it desires no other drink. It has found the tree of life, and it desires no other fruit.

Secondly: *The manifestation of the love of Christ gives the soul abundant contentment.* This love of Christ is exceedingly sweet and satisfying; it is better than life because it is the love of a Person of such dignity and excellence. The sweetness of His love depends very much upon the greatness of His excellence: so much the more lovely the person, so much the more desirable is his love. How sweet must the love of that person be Who is the eternal Son of God, Who is of equal dignity with the Father! How great a happiness must it be to be the object of the love of Him Who is the Creator of the world, by Whom all things consist, Who is exalted at God's right hand and made Head over principalities and powers in heavenly places, Who has all things put under His feet, is King of kings and Lord of lords, and is the brightness of the Father's glory! Surely to be beloved by Him is enough to satisfy the soul of a worm of the dust.

This love of Christ is also exceedingly sweet and satisfying from the greatness of it. It is a *dying* love, such love as never before was seen and such as no other can parallel. There have been instances of very great love between one earthly friend and another: there was a surpassing love between David and Jonathan. But there never was any such love as Christ has towards believers. The satisfying nature of this love arises also from the sweet fruits of it. Those precious benefits that Christ bestows upon His people and those precious promises that He has given them are the fruit of this love. Joy and hope are the constant streams that flow from *this* fountain: the love of Christ.

Thirdly: *There is provision for the satisfaction and contentment of the thirsty, longing soul in Christ, as He is the way to the Father.* [This is] not only from the fullness of excellence and grace that He has in His own Person, but as by Him we may come to God, may be reconciled to Him, and may be made happy in His favor and love.

The poverty and want of the soul in its natural state consist *in its being separated from God*, for God is the riches and the happiness of the creature. But we are naturally alienated from God, and God is alienated from us: our Maker is not at peace with us. But in Christ, there is a way for free communication between God and us—for us to come to God, and for God to communicate Himself to us by His Spirit. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Joh 14:6). “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ...For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph 2:13, 18-19).

Christ, by being thus the way to the Father, is the way to true happiness and contentment. “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (Joh 10:9). Hence, I would take occasion to [call] needy, thirsty souls to come to Jesus! “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (Joh 7:37). You that have not yet come to Christ are in a poor, necessitous condition. You are in a parched wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land. And if you are thoroughly awakened, you are sensible that you are in distress and ready to faint for lack of something to satisfy your souls. Come to Him Who is “as rivers of water in a dry place.” There are plenty and fullness in Him. He is like a river that is always flowing: you may live by it forever and never be in need. Come to Him Who has such excellence as is sufficient to give full contentment to your soul, a Person of transcendent glory and ineffable beauty, where you may entertain the view of your soul forever without weariness and without being [overfilled]. [Believe the] love of Him, Who is the only-begotten Son of God and His elect, in Whom His soul delighteth (Isa 42:1). Through Christ, come to God the Father, from Whom you have departed by sin. He is the way, the truth, and the life! He is the door by which if any man enters, he shall be saved.

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Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758): American Congregational preacher; born in East Windsor, Connecticut Colony.

THE HELLISH SIN OF DISCONTENT

Thomas Boston (1676-1732)

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.”—Exodus 20:17

QUESTION: “What is forbidden in the Tenth Commandment?” **ANSWER:** “The Tenth Commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying, or grieving at the good of our neighbor, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.”⁶⁷ This command is a curb and bridle to the distempered⁶⁸ heart of man, which of all parts of man is the hardest to be commanded and kept within bounds. Men may be of a courteous, obliging behavior: [they may] keep their hands from killing or what tendeth thereunto, their bodies from uncleanness, their hands from stealing, and their tongues from lying, while in the meantime, the heart in all these respects may be going within the breast like a troubled sea, unto which this command by divine authority saith, “Peace, and be still” (*cf.* Mar 4:39).

The heart distempered by original sin runs out in the irascible faculty⁶⁹ in tormenting passions, bearing an aversion of the heart to what the Lord in His wisdom lays before men...Thus, the corrupt heart runs in direct opposition to the will of God, refusing what He would have us to accept and embracing closely what He would have us to stand at a distance from. The corrupt fountain with its several streams is all here forbidden...Let us view

The tormenting passions in which the corruption of nature vents itself, for sin, in its own nature, is misery. We need but go in the paths of sin to make us miserable and in the high road of duty to make us happy. We shall consider the tormenting passion of discontent with our own estate or condition. This is plainly forbidden here. For discontentment is presupposed to⁷⁰ coveting, and there could be no coveting of what we want without discontentment with what we have...

FIRST, I WILL SHEW THE EVIL OF DISCONTENTMENT AND PAINT OUT THIS SIN IN ITS BLACK COLORS. It is the hue of hell all over.

1. In the nature of it, discontent is a compound of the blackest ingredients: the scum of the corrupt heart boiling up and mixed to make up the hellish composition.

Unsubjection to⁷¹ and rebellion against the will of God: “Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer” (Hos 4:16)—backsliding or refractory⁷² that will not admit the yoke farther than it is forced on. The discontented heart cannot submit...Though God guides and governs the world, they are the malcontents⁷³ that are not pleased with the government but mutiny against it. What pleases God pleases them not; what is right in God’s eyes is evil in theirs. Nothing will please them but to have the reins of government out of God’s hands into their own...

Sorrow of heart under the divine dispensation towards them: It is not according to their mind, and so their heart sinks in sorrow (1Ki 21:4). God crosses their will, and they pierce their own hearts with many sorrows...This is a killing sorrow, a sword thrust into a man’s heart by his own hands (2Co 7:10). It melts a man’s heart within him...It makes him [depressed] and heavy like Ahab and is a heavy load above the burden of affliction. That is the black smoke of discontentment that yet often breaks out into a fiery flame...

⁶⁷ Question 148 from the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648).

⁶⁸ **distempered** – disordered; diseased.

⁶⁹ **irascible faculty** – in Plato’s view, courage, spirit, and passion resided in the irascible part of the human soul.

⁷⁰ **presupposed to** – implied as something already present before.

⁷¹ **unsubjection to** – refusal to obey; resistant.

⁷² **refractory** – stubbornly resistant to authority.

⁷³ **malcontents** – persons who are dissatisfied and rebellious.

Anger and wrath against their lot: complainers (Jude 1:16). The word signifies such as are angry with their lot and in the distributions Providence makes of the world... They are angry at God's dispensations, and their hearts rise against it and snarl at it. This is a fretting anger, whereby men disquiet and vex themselves in vain, like men dashing their heads against the wall. The wall stands unmoved, but their heads are wounded!...

Lastly, there is a spice of heart-blasphemy in it: [Discontent] strikes very directly against God, the Governor of the world, and accuses His administration. For an evidence of this, it sometimes breaks out in words: "Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD... Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?" (Mal 3:13-14).

Discontent accuses Him (1) *of folly*—as if He were not wise enough to govern the world. The peevish, discontented person in his false light sees many flaws in the conduct of Providence and pretends to tell God how He may correct His work and how it would be better...(2) *of injustice*—as if He did us wrong. The Judge of all the earth cannot but do right. He cannot be bribed nor biased. Yet the discontented heart rises against Him and blasphemes Him as a respecter of persons... If we *do* deserve the evil in our lot, there is no wrong done us. Why do we then complain? And to fill up the measure, it accuseth Him (3) *of cruelty*. Job, in a fit of discontent, speaks it out, "Thou art become cruel to me" (Job 30:21). Thus, goodness itself is blasphemed by the discontented, who behave as if they were under the hands of a merciless tyrant who would sport himself with one's misery. Discontent fills the heart with black and hard thoughts of God and represents Him as a rigid master and cruel lord. Otherwise, people would lay their hand on their mouth and be content...

Thus, ye see the picture of discontent. Does it not look very black? There are ounces and pounds of rebellion against the will of God! [There are] killing sorrow, fretting anger, and hideous heart-blasphemy in it, while there is not *one grain of religion or reason* that goes into this hellish composition. If one should take it for a description of hell, he would not be far out. For the truth is, discontent is a hell in the bosom and a lively emblem of the pit of darkness!

2. If ye view discontentment in the rise of it, ye will see further into the evil of it. It takes its rise from

A blinded judgment that puts darkness for light and light for darkness. [It] cannot see into the wisdom of the conduct of Providence, which does all things well. When our blind minds begin to refine on the management of holy Providence, they are apt to produce discontent, which in respect of Providence is always unreasonable. See how good Jacob bewrays⁷⁴ his folly and ignorance of the methods of Providence: "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Gen 42:36). Compare this with the promise, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28); and compare the event. Ye will see that all these things were for the benefit of the good patriarch and that of his numerous family... There is never a ground of discontent, but the blind mind does magnify it and lays to it such heaps of rubbish [that] the heart is not able to stand under it, as in the case of Rachel. When Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister. [She] said unto Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die" (Gen 30:1). Thus, our own dark minds are the anvil on which our miseries are beat out into greater breadth and length than they are [when] they come out of the hand of God, to the end they may cover our hearts with discontent. Happy is the man that can take up his cross as God lays it down without adding more to it.

A proud heart. Haman's pride discontented him for want of bows and cringes from Mordecai (Est 3:2, 5), which would never have troubled a humble man. A proud heart is a *wide heart*⁷⁵ (Pro 28: 25). Little will not fill it: it is long ere⁷⁶ it will say, "It is enough"; so it natively produces discontent. The devil is the proudest creature and withal⁷⁷ the most discontented, for pride and discontent always lodge under one roof...

An unmortified affection to the creature⁷⁸ (1Ti 6:9-10). Jonah had a gourd, and he was exceedingly glad of it. It is taken away, and then he was exceedingly discontented (Jon 4:6, 9). The heart takes such a hold of such and such a

⁷⁴ **bewrays** – shows.

⁷⁵ **wide heart** – the Hebrew word translated "proud" in Proverbs 28:25 is *rachab*, which means "wide, broad of soul" and can mean "arrogant" or "selfish." (Willem VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, Vol. 3, 1091)

⁷⁶ **ere** – before.

⁷⁷ **therewith** – with that; thereupon.

⁷⁸ **unmortified affection...creature** – sinful love for creature comforts that has not been put to death by faith in Christ, self-control, and prayer.

created comfort that it becomes like a live limb of a man's body. So when it is rent away, [it is no wonder that one cries out] as if men were cutting a limb off him?...So, were our affection to the creature deadened to it—as it should be—discontent could have no access.

A spirit of unbelief. Lack of faith marred the acceptance of Cain's offering and opened the sluice⁷⁹ of discontent on him too. "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell" (Heb 11:4; Gen 4:5). Discontent feeds on need; faith brings in the supply of needs and can feed on it while it is yet in the promise. No wonder discontent prevails where unbelief is! A [living] faith would kill discontent, whereas unbelief nourishes and cherishes it. Discontent puts an effectual bar in the way of the rest of the heart, which it can never attain but in God.

3. View it in the effect, and it will appear very black. The tree is known by its fruits.

It mars communion with and access to God. Muddy and troubled water receives not the image of the sun as clear and standing water does. So a discontented heart is unfit for communion with a holy God (1Ti 2:8). "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amo 3:3). If one would have communion with God, his heart must not be boiling with anger against his brother (Mat 5:23-24). How then can he have it when he is angry with his God, as in discontent?

It quite unfits a man for holy duties—for speaking to God in prayer or His speaking to them by His Word—so that he cannot perform them rightly or acceptably. (1) It deadens one's heart within him as in Nabal's case. "His heart died within him, and he became as a stone" (1Sa 25:37). (2) It takes away the relish of spiritual things, vitiates⁸⁰ the taste, and turns them sapless⁸¹ to people, as it did to the Israelites in Egypt (Exo 6:7-9). (3) To pore on the ground of discontent carries the heart off [Christian] duty and makes [God's people] drive heavily in God's worship and serve Him drooping and heartless, as it did the Jews in Malachi's time (Mal 2:13-14). Their unkindness to their wives made them discontented and fretful, so that when they came to the temple, they were quite out of humor.⁸²

It mars the comfort of society and makes people [disagreeable] to those that are about them. When Elkanah went up to Shiloh with his family to rejoice before the Lord, fretting Hannah was out of tune and marred the harmony (1Sa 1:7-8). Peninnah provoked Hannah, Hannah was angry with her, and Elkanah [was angry] with both. So discontent is the pest of society and makes an evil world ten times worse. It makes people a burden to others because it gives them a cloudy day while it lasts.

It is a torment to one's self and makes a man his own tormentor (1Ki 21:4). It wraps him up in darkness, feeds him with bitterness, and gives him gall and wormwood to drink for his ordinary⁸³ (Pro 15:16). It robs him of the best worldly thing he can possess, i. e., his peace and tranquility of mind. [It] makes his mind within him as the troubled sea that cannot rest. So the discontented person is on a continual rack,⁸⁴ and he himself is executioner...

It sucks the sap out of all one's enjoyments. As a few drops of gall will embitter a cup of wine and a few drops of ink will blacken a cup of the clearest liquor, so discontent upon one ground will embitter and blacken all other enjoyments...See it in Ahab: "And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread" (1Ki 21:4). As contentment turns all metals into gold, so discontentment turns them into iron. What taste is there in the white of an egg without salt? There is as much as in any enjoyment under the sun without contentment...therefore let a man have what he will, he enjoys no more than what he has contentment in.

Hence, it always makes one unthankful. Let Providence set the discontented man in a paradise: the fruit of that one tree that is forbidden him...will so embitter him that he will not give God thanks for all the variety of other delights that the garden is furnished with. For all these avail him nothing while that is kept out of his reach...Ingratitude is a sin of a black die: how much more must that be so which is the cause of it?

It is a fruitful womb of other sins. It brings forth a great brood of other lusts...I will instance in three of the grossest sins that man can readily fall into, which are the natural product of discontentment. (1) *Murder*—the grossest sin

⁷⁹ **sluice** – a dam with an adjustable gate to control the flow of water.

⁸⁰ **vitiates** – perverts, so as to lead to false preferences.

⁸¹ **sapless** – lacking vital energy.

⁸² **out of humor** – in a bad mood.

⁸³ **ordinary** – regular daily meal.

⁸⁴ **rack** – an instrument of torture consisting of a frame on which the victim was stretched by turning rollers to which the wrists and ankles were tied.

of the Second Table...is the product of discontent. For once the heart, smoking with discontent, breaks out into a flame, it breathes out blood and slaughter...The worst sort of murder proceeds from it: the murder of nearest relations, as in the case of Cain's murdering Abel (Gen 4:5, 8). Worst of all, self-murder always proceeds from it...People grow discontented with their lot, [and] their proud hearts are not able to bear it. They turn desperate, seeing they cannot [remedy] it, and make away with themselves.⁸⁵ (2) *Dealing with the devil*—being angry with God, the discontented are in a fair way⁸⁶ to be a prey to Satan. Thus Saul, in a fit of discontent, went to the witch at Endor (1Sa 28). The discontented heart is a drumly⁸⁷ heart, and it is in such waters that Satan loves to fish. Here is his hook wherewith he catches them: he proffers to do for them or give to them that which God will not. And they being intent upon it, so that they cannot be easy⁸⁸ without it, are easily ensnared...(3) *Blasphemy against God*—the grossest sin of the First Table, for of that kind is the unpardonable sin. Discontent is in its own nature a practical blasphemy. Therefore, when it comes to a height, it breaks out in open blasphemy, as in that abominable mouth, “Behold, this evil is of the LORD; what should I wait for the LORD any longer?” (2Ki 6:33). For being angry with God, people begin to quarrel with Him and murmur against Him...It is hard to speak and speak *right* under great pressures. These effects may convince us of the exceeding evil of this root of bitterness.

Lastly, view it in the qualities that agree to it, which are not in many other sins. I will name the following:

Discontent is the noted rebel in the kingdom of providence. God, Who has created the world, vindicates the government of it to Himself alone. But the discontented go about to wrest the reins of government out of His hand! Discontent wages war with the Governor of the world and strives with Him, as if the clay should strive with the potter and say, “Why hast thou made me thus?” (Rom 9:20).

Discontent is a peculiar despiser of the kingdom of grace. There is a particular malignity in it against the grace of the Gospel; for it throws contempt on God, heaven, and all the purchase of Christ, which is [declared] in the Gospel to fill up the room of what the discontented lacks (Exo 6:7, 9). It is true: other lusts do so too, such as covetousness, sensuality, and profaneness. But here lies the difference: these lusts have a bait of profit or pleasure with them and have something to put in the [place] of spiritual things. Discontent has *no* bait with it, or anything to put in the [place] of them...The discontented would rather pine away without any comfort than take it from the Gospel...

Discontent follows men to and will continue with them in the kingdom of darkness forever. There are some lusts that men have no use for beyond the line of time. The covetous will despise their gold, money, and wealth in hell, the unclean person his filthy companions, etc. But when the discontented die without repentance, their works will follow them to the pit. In hell, they will be discontented forever without the least intermission. They will never give one smile more, but an eternal cloud of darkness will be on their countenance. They will fret, murmur, and rage against God and themselves and blaspheme for evermore. Let us see the evil of this, then, and guard against it.

SECOND, I WILL OFFER SOME REMEDIES AGAINST DISCONTENT AND ADVICES IN THE CASE.

Practice the directions for contentment. Particularly, take God for your God in Christ, and labor to believe He is so. Take Him in the room of whatever ye lack or lies on you that discontents you. Without this, all else will be in vain. The enjoyment of God is able to make up the greatest hole in your heart!...“The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zep 3:17).

Labor to be humble. Humility lets us see that our true worth is nothing and fences the heart against discontent (Gen 32:10). It makes one wonder he has anything at all left him, and so lets him into the mystery of that text: “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1Th 5:18). He that is convinced that he deserves death will not be discontent with banishment. And he that believes that he deserves to lose the presence of God forever will lay his hand on his mouth under temporal losses.

Do not pore upon your crosses, for that does but breed and feed discontent (Psa 39:3)...Turn your eyes on your mercies that you enjoy and be thankful.

⁸⁵ **make...themselves** – commit suicide.

⁸⁶ **in a fair way** – likely.

⁸⁷ **drumly** – gloomy.

⁸⁸ **easy** – free from mental anxiety.

Be much exercised in religious duties. Go often to your knees and pour out your hearts before the Lord. Tell Him all your [needs]. This gave Hannah a sweet ease (1Sa 1:18). Go often to your Bibles and hear the good news there from the far country...There are springs of consolation there that a person never tastes of until he is brought into the condition for which they were placed there.

Curb discontent as soon as it begins to set out its head. Nip it in the bud, for it is a fire that gathers force by continuing and spreading...Discontent is a striving with God and is like the letting out of waters, which, however small at the beginning, grows to a monstrous bigness if not remedied [early].

Lastly, live by faith. That is the *best* preservative against discontent. Faith stays the soul in all events on the promises [and] gives a favorable view of all crosses and afflictions, as tending to the good of the party. [Faith] lays hold upon things unseen as the great portion and so lessens the care about things of the world. In a word, [faith] finds all it needs in God. Thus much of discontent.

From "Of the Tenth Commandment" in *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston*, Vol. 2, reprinted by Tentmaker Publications, www.tentmakerpublications.com.

Thomas Boston (1676-1732): Scottish Presbyterian minister and scholar; born in Duns, Berwickshire.

I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

"He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."—Hebrews 13:5

CONTENTMENT is a tranquility of soul, a being satisfied with what God has apportioned. It is the opposite of a grasping spirit that is never appeased, with distrustful anxiety, with petulant⁸⁹ murmurings. "It is a gracious disposition of mind, arising solely from trust in and satisfaction with God alone, against all other things whatever that may appear to be evil."⁹⁰ It is our duty to have the scales of our heart so equally poised in all God's dealings with us as that they rise not in prosperity, nor sink in adversity...When tempted to complain at your lot, meditate upon Him Who when here had not where to lay His head, Who was constantly misunderstood by friends and hated by innumerable enemies. Contemplation of the cross of Christ is a wonderful composer of an agitated mind and a querulous⁹¹ spirit.

"Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Here is an enforcement of what has just gone before, a reason for the duties enjoined, a motive supplied for the performance of them. One of the divine promises is quoted, which if it be duly appropriated by us, we shall be dissuaded from covetousness and persuaded to contentment. Resting on this divine assurance will both moderate our desires and alleviate our fears. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" is a guarantee of God's continual provision and protection, and this rebukes all inordinate desires and condemns all anxious fears. The evils are closely connected: in most instances, *covetousness* in the Christian is rooted in a fear of need, while *discontent* generally arises from a suspicion that our present portion will prove to be inadequate for the supply of our needs. Each such disquietude⁹² is equally irrational and God-dishonoring.

Both covetousness and discontent proceed from unbelief. If I really trust God, will I have any qualms about the future or tremble at the prospect of starvation? Certainly not: the two things are incompatible, opposites—"I will trust, and not be afraid" (Isa 12:2). Thus, the Apostle's argument is clear and convincing: "Let your conversation

⁸⁹ **petulant** – childishly bad-tempered.

⁹⁰ John Owen, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol.7, 412-413.

⁹¹ **querulous** – complaining in a whining manner.

⁹² **disquietude** – feelings of anxiety that make one tense and irritable.

be without covetousness; be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee”...“He has said”—*who* has? Why, One Whose power is *omnipotent*, Whose wisdom is *infinite*, Whose faithfulness is *inviolable*,⁹³ Whose love is *unchanging*. “All the efficacy, power, and comfort of divine promises arise from and are resolved into the excellencies of the divine nature. He Who is truth hath said it and cannot deceive.”⁹⁴ And what is it that He has said, which, if faith truly lays hold of, will subdue covetousness and work contentment? This: “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” God’s presence, God’s providence, God’s protection are here assured us. If due regard be paid to these inestimable blessings, the heart will be kept in peace. What more would we have save a conscious realization of the same? O for a felt sense of His presence, for a gracious manifestation thereof to the soul! What were all the wealth, honors, pleasures of the world worth, if He should totally and finally desert us? The comfort of our soul does not depend upon outward provisions so much as on our appropriation and enjoyment of what is contained in the divine promises. If we rested more on them, we would crave less of this world’s goods. What possible cause or ground for fear remains when God has pledged us His continual presence and assistance?

“**I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.**” It is almost impossible to reproduce in English the emphasis of the original, in which no less than five negatives are used to increase the strength of the negation, according to the Greek idiom. Perhaps the nearest approximation is to render it, “I will never, no, never leave thee, nor ever forsake thee.” In view of such assurance, we should fear no want, dread no distress, nor have any trepidation⁹⁵ about the future. At no time, under any circumstances conceivable or inconceivable, for any possible cause, will God utterly and finally forsake one of His own. Then how *safe* they are! How *impossible* for one of them to eternally perish! God has here graciously condescended to give the utmost security to the faith of believers in all their difficulties and trials. The continued presence of God with us ensures the continued supply of every need.

“**For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.**” These words were first spoken by Jehovah to the successor of Moses (Jos 1:5), whose task it was to dispossess Canaan of all the heathen nations then inhabiting it...This precious promise of God belongs as truly to me now as it did to Joshua of old. Let us then tenaciously hold this principle: the divine promises that were made upon *special* occasions to particular individuals are of *general* use for all the members of the household of faith...Are not the needs of believers the same in one age as another? Is not God affected alike unto all His children? Does He not bear them the same love? If, then, He would not desert Joshua, He will not any of us...“Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4)...

“**So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me**” (Heb 13:6). Once more, the Apostle confirms his argument by a divine testimony, for he quotes from Psalm 118:6. In this citing of David’s language, Christians are again taught the suitability of O.T. language unto their own case and the permissibility of appropriating the same unto themselves: “we may boldly say” just what the Psalmist did!...The believer is weak and unstable in himself and constantly in need of assistance, but the Lord is ever ready to take his part and render all needed aid. “The Lord is my helper” implies, as William Gouge (1575-1653) pointed out, “a willing readiness and a ready willingness to afford us all needed succor.” Those whom He forsakes not, He helps—both inwardly and outwardly. Note carefully the change from “we may boldly say” to “the Lord is my helper”: general privileges are to be appropriated by us in particular. “Man can do much: he can fine, imprison, banish, reduce to a morsel of bread, yea, torture, and put to death; yet as long as God is with us and standeth for us, we may boldly say, ‘I will not fear what man can do.’ Why? God will not see thee utterly perish. He can give joy in sorrow, life in death.”⁹⁶ May the Lord graciously grant both writer and reader more faith in Himself, more reliance upon His promises, more consciousness of His presence, more assurance of His help, and then we shall enjoy more deliverance from covetousness, discontent, and the fear of man.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, reprinted by and available from Chapel Library.

A.W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, author; born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and returned to his homeland in 1934; born in Nottingham, England.

⁹³ **inviolable** – incapable of being broken.

⁹⁴ Owen, 413.

⁹⁵ **trepidation** – feeling of alarm or dread.

⁹⁶ Thomas Manton, “Sermon upon Hebrews 13:5,” *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, Vol. 18, 452.

MY TIMES IN GOD'S HAND

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

“My times are in thy hand.”—Psalm 31:15

BELOVED, God has placed us in a school in which He is teaching us to lay our blind reason at His feet, to cease from our own wisdom and guidance, and lean upon and confide in Him as children with a parent. The goodness of God to us, combined with a jealous regard to His own glory, constrains Him to conceal the path along which He conducts us. His promise is, “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them” (Isa 42:16)...Dear child of God, your afflictions, your trials, your crosses, your losses, your sorrows—all—*all* are in your heavenly Father’s hand. They cannot come until sent by Him. Bow that stricken heart, yield that tempest-tossed soul to His sovereign disposal, to His calm, righteous sway, in the submissive spirit and language of your suffering Savior, “Not my will, but thine, be done (Luk 22:42)! My times of sadness and of grief are in Thy hand.”

Times of soul-distress, spiritual darkness, and conflict are in His hand. Many such are there in the experience of the true saints of God. Many the hard-fought battle, the fiery dart, the desperate wound, the momentary defeat in the Christian’s life...But it is in the Lord’s hand. No spiritual cloud shades, no mental distress depresses, no fiery dart is launched that is not by Him permitted, and for which there is not a provision by Him arranged. There is nothing that the Lord has taken more entirely and exclusively into His keeping than the redeemed, sanctified souls of His people. All their interests for eternity are exclusively in His hand. In the infinite fullness of Jesus, in the inexhaustible supply of the covenant,⁹⁷ in the exceeding great and precious promises of His Word, He has anticipated every spiritual exigency⁹⁸ of the believer. How precious is your soul to Him Who bore all its sins, Who exhausted all its curse, Who travailed for it in ignominy⁹⁹ and suffering, and Who ransomed it with His own most precious blood. Guarded, also, by His indwelling Spirit is His kingdom of righteousness, joy, and peace within you. Oh, endeavor to realize that, whatever be your mental exercises, spiritual conflicts, doubts and fears, your “times” of soul despondency are in the Lord’s hand.

Lodged there, safe are your spiritual interests. “All His saints are in His hand” (*cf.* Deu 33:3). And He to Whose care you have confided your redeemed soul has pledged Himself for its eternal security. Of His own sheep He says, “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than all: and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand” (Joh 10:28-29). With like precious faith and humble assurance, you are privileged to exclaim with Paul, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2Ti 1:12).

Ah! As soon shall Christ Himself perish, as one bought with His blood. No member of His body, insignificant though it may be, shall be dissevered.¹⁰⁰ No temple of the Holy Spirit, frail and imperfect though it is, shall be destroyed. Not a soul to whom the divine image has been restored and the divine nature has been imparted, upon whose heart the name of Jesus has been carved, shall be involved in the final and eternal destruction of the wicked. Nothing shall perish but the earthly and the sensual. Not one grain of precious faith shall be lost, not one spark of divine light shall be extinguished, not one pulsation of spiritual life shall die!

⁹⁷ **covenant** – a reference to the Covenant of Grace (*see* p.15, Note 8).

⁹⁸ **exigency** – urgent need; unforeseen crisis.

⁹⁹ **ignominy** – public shame or disgrace.

¹⁰⁰ **dissevered** – separated.

Oh, think of this, you who have fled all sinful and trembling to Jesus, you who cling to Him...as the ivy to the oak: *never* shall you lose that hold of faith you have on Christ, and never will Christ lose that hold of love He has on you. You and Jesus are one, indivisibly and eternally one. Nothing shall separate you from His love, nor sever you from His care, nor exclude you from His sympathy, nor banish you from His heaven of eternal blessedness. *You* are in Christ, the subject of His grace; and *Christ* is in you, the hope of glory (Col 1:27). All your cares are Christ's care, all your sorrows are Christ's sorrow, all your need is Christ's supply, all your sicknesses are Christ's cure, all your crosses are Christ's burden. Your life—temporal, spiritual, eternal—is “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Oh, the unutterable blessings that spring from a vital union with the Lord Jesus! The believer can exultingly say, “Christ and I are one! One in nature, one in affection, one in sympathy, one in fellowship, and one through the countless ages of eternity! The life I live is a life of faith in Him (Gal 2:20). I fly to Him in the confidence of a loving friend, in the simplicity of a little child, and I reveal to Him my secret sorrow. I confess to Him my hidden sin. I acknowledge my heart backsliding. I make known to Him my needs, my sufferings, my fears. I tell Him how chilled my affection is, how reserved my obedience is, how imperfect my service is—and yet how I long to love Him more ardently, to follow Him more closely, to serve Him more devotedly, to be more wholly and holily His. And how does He meet me? With a hearkening ear, with a beaming eye, with a gracious word, with an outstretched hand with benignity¹⁰¹ and gentleness all like Himself.” Confide, then, dear reader, your spiritual and deathless interests in the Lord's hand...

To those who, depressed with a painful foreboding at their final dissolution,¹⁰² are all their lifetime subject to bondage, how consolatory¹⁰³ is the reflection that the time of the believer's death is peculiarly in the Lord's hand. It is solemnly true that there is a “time to die” (Ecc 3:2). Ah! Affecting thought—“a time to die!”—a time when this mortal conflict will be over; when this heart will cease to feel, alike insensible to joy or sorrow; when this head will ache and these eyes will weep no more! [It will be the] best and holiest of all: a time “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality” (1Co 15:54), and “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2)...If this be so, then, O Christian, why this anxious, trembling fear? Your time of death, with all its attendant circumstances, is in the Lord's hand. All is appointed and arranged by Him Who loves you and Who redeemed you—infinite goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness consulting your highest happiness in each circumstance of your departure. The final sickness cannot come, the “last enemy” cannot strike until He bids it. All is in His hand. Then calmly, confidingly leave life's closing scene with Him. *You cannot die away from Jesus*. Whether your spirit wings its flight at home or abroad, amid strangers or friends, by a lingering process or by a sudden stroke, in brightness or in gloom, Jesus will be with you! Upheld by His grace and cheered with His presence, you shall triumphantly exclaim, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psa 23:4), bearing your dying testimony to the faithfulness of God and the preciousness of His promises. “My time to die is in your hand, O Lord, and there I calmly leave it”...In *whose* hand are the believer's times? In a Father's hand. Be those times what they may, times of trial, times of temptation, times of suffering, times of peril, times of sunshine or of gloom, of life or death—they are in a *Parent's hand*. Is your present path lonely and dreary? Has the Lord seen fit to recall some fond blessing, to deny some earnest request, or painfully to discipline your heart? All this springs from a Father's love as fully as though He had unlocked His treasury and poured its costliest gifts at your feet...

In a Redeemer's hand, also, are our times. That same Redeemer Who carried our sorrows in His heart, our curse and transgressions on His soul, our cross on His shoulder, Who died, Who rose again, Who lives and intercedes for us, and Who will gather all His ransomed around Him in glory is your guardian and your guide. Can you not cheerfully confide all your earthly concerns, all your spiritual interests to His keeping and control? “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1Pe 5:7)? “Oh, yes!” faith replies, “in that hand that still bears in its palm the print of the nail are all my times. ‘I will trust, and not be afraid’ (Isa 12:2).”

Unconverted reader do you ask, “In whose hand are *my* times?” I answer, “In that Infinite Sovereign's, ‘the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways’ (Dan 5:23).” I confront you... with this solemn truth: Your times are in God's hand. In Him you live, move, and have your being (*see* Act 17:28). You cannot be independent of God for a single breath, a single thought, or a single step. From His government you cannot break, from His eye

¹⁰¹ **benignity** – kindness.

¹⁰² **foreboding...dissolution** – fearfully anticipating their death.

¹⁰³ **consolatory** – comforting.

you cannot hide, from His power you cannot flee. He holds you responsible for all your endowments, acquirements, and doings, and before long will say to you, “give an account of thy stewardship” (Luk 17:2)...Oh, that this year, *your stubborn will*, after so long a resistance; *your rebellious heart*, after its years of closing and hardening against a [calling] Savior, may be sweetly constrained to bow to the despised Gospel of Christ, born of the Spirit, a child of God, an heir of happiness that the revolution of time and the ages of eternity shall never terminate.

Ah! Of how many who read these pages may the decree have already gone forth: “Thus saith the LORD... this year thou shalt die” (Jer 28:16)! Oh, dismal sentence to those who have no union with the Lord Jesus! Dear reader, are you preparing and resolving to spend this year as all the previous years of your life have been spent? What! In hating God, in abusing His mercies, in despising His Son, in neglecting His salvation, in hardening your heart in sin, in living for the world and to yourself, and in treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath? Is such a life worthy of your being? Can you bend the knee...and pray, “Great Author of my being! Father of all my mercies! Righteous Judge of the world! Grant me *another* year of rebellion and impiety, more time to waste, more mercies to abuse, more means of grace to neglect, more property to squander, more influence to oppose and fight against You”?

You shudder at the thought! You could not for your life breathe such a prayer. Yet...in an unconverted state, are not your thoughts, temper, and resolves always far more expressive than words, insulting God with the spirit of a petition the language of which you dare not utter? Oh, that, gently, persuasively drawn by the Holy Spirit, you may now betake yourself to the Lord Jesus as a self-destroyed, yet humble, repentant sinner. Oh, that this may be the happy hour of your...unreserved surrender to the Lord to be His child, His servant forever!

True happiness, joy, and peace will ever be strangers to your heart until it tastes the love of the Savior. Nor will you be able to give yourself to the high and noble duties of real life or to contemplate death with calmness and the eternity that stretches beyond it with hope, until you are reconciled to God through the “one mediator¹⁰⁴ between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Ti 2:5)...The atoning work is finished, the great salvation is purchased, the mighty debt is paid, all perfected and secured by the blood of God’s incarnate Son. And now it is His good pleasure and delight to confer this priceless, precious boon¹⁰⁵ upon everyone who is of a “contrite and humble spirit” (Isa 57:15) as an act of most free favor, however vile, undeserving, and poor the recipient might be. “By grace ye are saved” (Eph 2:5). “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace” (Rom 4:16). Before the majesty and splendor of this precious truth, all human glory must fade, all human pride must fall...That proud, rebellious, self-righteous heart of yours must be laid low in the dust. Enfold¹⁰⁶ yourself believingly in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be accepted...“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 3:24). It is written, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20). By the same inspiration, it is also written, “But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom 4:5). Then, from this act of most free justification¹⁰⁷ follows this precious, holy result: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with GOD through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). Oh, then, by all the deathless interests that are at stake, by the desire for a holy life, a happy death, and a glorious immortality, cease from yourself! Relinquish all reliance upon sacraments, religious duties, and charitable works. Under a spiritual, deep conviction of the desperate sinfulness of your fallen and corrupt nature—the plague of your own heart (1Ki 8:38), your condemnation by the Law, your entire inability to save yourself, and your utter unpreparedness to stand before the holy Lord God—flee to Christ! Avail yourself of the great salvation that He has effectually wrought and most freely bestows.

What will be your reception by the Savior? Does it admit of a doubt? Oh, no! Not one. He came into the world to save sinners and He will save you. His compassion *inclines* Him to save sinners; His power *enables* Him to save sinners; His promise *binds* Him to save sinners. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ

¹⁰⁴ **mediator** – a go-between. 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)

¹⁰⁵ **boon** – a thing freely and graciously bestowed.

¹⁰⁶ **enfold** – wrap up, as with a garment.

¹⁰⁷ **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32)

Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Ti 1:15)...It is not great faith, nor deep experience, nor extensive knowledge that are required. The dimmest eye that ever looked to Christ, the feeblest hand that ever took hold of Christ, the most trembling step that ever traveled to Christ has in it present salvation, has in it life eternal. The smallest measure of real faith will take the soul to heaven...Jesus suffered to the uttermost, therefore He is able to “save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb 7:25).

Let us, in conclusion, trace the practical influence that this truth should exert upon our minds...Let this precious truth, “My times are in your hand,” divest your mind of all needless, anxious care for the present or the future. Exercising simple faith in God...“Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5). Learn to be content with your present lot, with God’s dealings with and His disposal of you. You are just where His providence has, in its [mysterious] but all-wise and righteous decision, placed you. It may be a painful, irksome, trying position, *but it is right*. Oh, yes! It is right! Only aim to glorify Him in it. Wherever you are placed, God has a work for you to do, a purpose through you to be accomplished, in which He blends your happiness with His glory. And when you have learned the lessons of His love, He will transfer you to another and a wider sphere...

Strive, then [by faith], to live a life of daily dependence upon God. Oh, it is a sweet and holy life! It saves from many a desponding feeling, from many a corroding care, from many an anxious thought, from many a sleepless night, from many a tearful eye, and from many an imprudent and sinful scheme...Oh, yes! beloved reader, thank God that your times, your interests, your salvation, are all out of your hands, and out of the hands of all creatures, supremely and safely in His. Forward in the path of duty, of labor, and of suffering. Aim to resemble Christ more closely in your disposition, your spirit, your whole life. Soon will it be said, “The Master is come, and calleth for thee” (Joh 11:28)...Patient in endurance, submissive in suffering, content with God’s allotment, zealous, prayerful, and watchful—be found standing in “thy lot at the end of the days” (Dan 12:13). Trust God implicitly for the future. No sorrow comes but shall open some sweet spring of comfort...No affliction befalls but shall be attended with the Savior’s tenderest sympathy...Let your constant prayer be “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe” (Psa 119:17). Let your daily precept be “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1Pe 5:7). And then leave God to fulfill, as most faithfully He will, His own gracious, precious promise, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deu 33:25). Thus walking with God through this valley of tears until you exchange sorrow for joy, suffering for ease, sin for purity, labor for rest, conflict for victory, and all earth’s checkered,¹⁰⁸ gloomy scenes for the changeless, cloudless happiness and glory of heaven.

From *My Times in God’s Hand*, New York: A.D.F. Randolph, 1868.

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Nonconformist pastor, ordained 1833 in New York, but later moved to England; born in London, England.



Covetousness, discontent, and murmuring are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil.—*John Calvin*

Contentment of mind is one of the fruits of meekness of spirit.—*A. W. Pink*

Are you able to rejoice in tribulations? Are you happy in spite of the world? Do you have contentment?

Are you independent of the world and all its noise and bustle, its empty show, and all that may happen in it?

Do you have a place of rest and peace and quiet—a calm, undisturbed joy that the world can neither give nor take away?

If you have these things, “great grace” is upon you—the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

—*David Martyn Lloyd Jones*

¹⁰⁸ **checkered** – constantly changing.