

## **The Perils of Complaining and the Blessings of Contentment**

**1 Corinthians 10:10** For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; **3** and all ate the same spiritual food; **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

**6** Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. **7** Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play.” **8** Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. **9** Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. **10** Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. **12** Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. **13** No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure

### **Grumbling and Complaining**

#### **Its definition...**

**“to murmur, mutter, grumble, say anything against in a low tone”**

- 1 of the cooing of doves**
- 2 of those who confer secretly together**
- 3 of those who discontentedly complain**

**Matthew 20:11; Luke 5:30; John 6:41,43,61; John 7:32; 1 Cor 10:10**

**“Grumbling” (goggusmon) is an onomatopoeic word that sounds like what it means similar to words such as: buzz, boom, meow, or murmur. It describes the low, threatening, discontented muttering of a mob who distrust their leaders and are on the verge of an uprising.”**

#### **Old Testament occasions...**

**Exodus 14:10-12; Exodus 15:24; Exodus 16:1-3; Numbers 16:2-3,41,49; Numbers 17:5,10; Psalm 106:24-25**

#### **Its expression...**

**It is a verbal expression of one’s dissatisfaction with circumstances.**

## **Its severity...**

“The classic story on complaining and arguing is seen in Israel’s wilderness wanderings. When God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and they went into the wilderness, they complained about a lack of water (Ex 15) and a lack of food (Ex 16). In Numbers 11 they complained about their trials in the wilderness, and how they wanted meat. And throughout their time in the wilderness, they complained against Moses and God. Because of their complaining, God judged them and many died. Paul said this about Israel’s experience in 1 Corinthians 10:9-11:

We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

Paul said God killed them because of their grumbling through a destroying angel. In Numbers 11 God brought a fire and a severe plague in the camp that wiped out many of them.” <https://bible.org/seriespage/9-beware-complaining-and-arguing>

## **Its cause...**

### **1. A Matter of Perspective...**

#### **A. Our “portion”...**

Psalm 17:14 “...From men of the world, whose portion is in this life”

#### **B. Our view of the character of God...**

“Grumbling is an evidence of little faith in the gracious providence of God in all the affairs of our lives. And little faith is a dishonor to him. It belittles his sovereignty and wisdom and goodness.” John Piper

### **2. A Matter of Trust...**

“In the worldliness of our fallen nature, our hearts pursue earthly happiness. When sorrow, disappointment, and frustration inevitably come, we grumble and dishonor God. Thomas Manton said, “Murmuring is an anti-providence, a renouncing of God’s sovereignty.” Watson wrote, “Our murmuring is the devil’s music.” Joel Beeke

### **3. A Matter of Thankfulness...**

**Romans 7:7 (Coveting); 2 Peter 1:9 (Forgetfulness of forgiveness)**

**A failure to have thankfulness of heart stems from an elevated sense of self and is often associated with a sense of entitlement or bitterness from harboring perceived offenses.**

#### **Its Corrective...Contentment**

**Philippians 4:11** Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. **12** I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. **13** I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

#### **1. A Matter of Perspective**

**“The Puritans recognized that in Christ, our hearts have a new fundamental direction, one that cherishes God’s kingdom and righteousness above all earthly treasures.**

**Holiness begins and flourishes with faith in Christ. John Flavel wrote, “The soul is the life of the body, faith is the life of the soul, and Christ is the life of faith.” Isaac Ambrose said that we must fix our eyes upon Christ, not with a bare, intellectual knowledge but an inward and experiential “looking unto Jesus, such as stirs up affections in the heart, and the effects thereof in our life. . . . knowing, considering, desiring, hoping, believing, loving, joying, calling on Jesus, and conforming to Jesus.”**

**Holiness must be real in our private lives and families, or it is nothing but a hypocritical show. John Trapp wrote, “Follow hypocrites home to their houses, and there you shall see what they are.” Matthew Henry said, “It is not enough to put on our religion when we go abroad and appear before men; but we must govern ourselves by it in our families.” Real holiness is a reflection of Christ having been brought into the heart and the home.” Joel Beeke**

**Psalm 16:5** The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and my cup;  
You support my lot.  
**6** The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places;  
Indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.  
**11b** In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

## **John Piper on Grumbling**

**“One of the effects of my speaking nine times to pastors recently was conviction for my sin of grumbling. What happened was this. I spoke on the things that I love most. I spoke about the great and glorious God of Christian Hedonism —**

**The God who “works for those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4);**

**The God who “withholds no good thing from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11);**

**The God who “pursues us with goodness and mercy all our days” (Psalm 23:6)**

**The God who “works all things together for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28);**

**The God who “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, and so will surely give us all things with him” (Romans 8:32);**

**The God “through whom we can do all things” (Philippians 4:13);**

**The God “who supplies all our needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19);**

**The God who “will help us, and strengthen us and hold us up by the right hand of his righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10);**

**The God who “will never leave us or forsake us, so that we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid; what can man do to me’” (Hebrews 13:5–6);**

**The God who “will complete in me the work he began” (Philippians 1:6);**

**The God “in whose presence is fullness of joy and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11);**

**When I heard these things coming out of my mouth, I was deeply convicted that my heart had grumbled in these recent months.”**

## **2. A Matter of Trust**

Psalm 73:21 When my heart was embittered  
And I was pierced within,  
22 Then I was senseless and ignorant;  
I was like a beast before You.  
23 Nevertheless I am continually with You;  
You have taken hold of my right hand.  
24 With Your counsel You will guide me,  
And afterward receive me to glory.  
25 Whom have I in heaven but You?  
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.  
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,  
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.  
27 For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;  
You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.  
28 But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;  
I have made the Lord God my refuge,  
That I may tell of all Your works.

## **3. A Matter of Thankfulness**

**1 Thessalonians 5:18 ...in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**

**Matthew Henry, meditating on the theft of his wallet: "Let me be thankful, first, because he never robbed me before; second, because although he took my purse, he did not take my life; third, because although he took all I possessed, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."**

## **Joel Beeke on Contentment**

Paul writes in Philippians 4:11b, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." Is this not the Christian's distinct calling and wonderful privilege, that is, to have and to demonstrate true contentment in life? See, for example, Hebrews 13:5,1 Timothy 6:6, Philippians 4:6-7, and Psalm 37:4. Do you know and glow with Christian contentment in life?

Christian contentment is not only "an embracing of the providence of God," as one put it, but even more fundamentally, an embracing of the God of providence.

Wilhelmus à Brakel states in his helpful chapter on this subject that contentment “is not a mental determination to keep ourselves satisfied, but a disposition of the soul . . . . The stronger faith is, the greater the contentment with the will of God will also be.”

Contentment is not to be found in having favorable circumstances and many possessions, but it is found in the triune God alone, by living in union and communion with Christ and in obedience and service before the Lord (Ps. 23).

The lie of Satan as told in Genesis 3 and replayed in history ever since is that contentment can be found apart from God. Have you seen through this deception of the devil for yourself? This ungodly world is experiencing the miseries of countless forms of discontentment and fading dreams, living in rebellion and unbelief before God (Isa. 57:20–21). Confessing Christians should shine forth the gracious fruit of peaceful contentment in our restless world of rampant murmurings (Phil. 2:14–15). Do you let your light shine with the grace of contentment even in dark and difficult circumstances?

Christian contentment is learned as we genuinely and constantly look to Christ, the Savior of sinners, in Spirit-worked repentance and faith, and so discover what a graciously complete and completely gracious Savior Jesus is (Col. 2:9–10). As Brakel put it, “If you have the all-sufficient One as your salvation, are you then still in need of anything else? Is He not better to you than a thousand worlds? . . . Therefore, speak and practice what the godly did. ‘The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him’ (Lam. 3:24).”

Jeremiah Burroughs wrote similarly in his classic, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*: “A Christian finds satisfaction in every circumstance by getting strength from another, by going out of himself to Jesus Christ, by his faith acting upon Christ and bringing the strength of Jesus Christ into his own soul, he is thereby enabled to bear whatever God lays on him, by the strength that he finds from Jesus Christ.”

Do you affirm and demonstrate that while looking to Christ and abiding in Him and His Word under the ministry of the Holy Spirit there is no reason for any discontentment whatsoever, but only for true and growing contentment? The Good Shepherd calls His people to confess “my cup runneth over” in praise and honor to our triune God and in anticipation of heaven to come. Are you demonstrating this holy, happy contentment at home, school, church, and work? What areas in your life can you grow in by having and showing Christian contentment?

To move us from discontentment to contentment, the Savior calls to us, “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. . . . He should have fed them also with the finest of the wheat: and with honey out of the rock should I have satisfied thee” (Ps. 81:10b, 16).

Praise God who will lead His people in endless and everlasting contentment! All honor to Him, our Savior God, from whom all blessings flow—including real contentment! Consider what Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:6: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.”

Are you enrolled in the school of Christ for the gift and prize of Christian contentment? The “God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3) still welcomes more students, in and through Jesus Christ. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

### **Excerpts from Jeremiah Burroughs on “The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment”**

#### **Considerations to content the heart in any afflicted condition**

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

**b. The consideration that God is beforehand with us with His mercies should content us.** Oh, you have had mercy enough already to make you spend all the strength you have and time you shall live to bless God! I remember reading of a good man who had lived to fifty years of age and enjoyed his health for eight and forty years exceedingly well, and lived in prosperity; but the last two years, his body was exceedingly diseased. But he reasoned the case with himself thus: “Oh, Lord, You might have made all my life a life of torment and pain, but You have let me have eight and forty years in health. I will praise Your mercies for what I have had and will praise Your justice for what now I feel.”

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

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

at an end. But supposing it should not, death will put an end to all. All afflictions and troubles will soon be at an end.

### **What course to take that we may attain this grace of contentment**

**a. All the rules and helps in the world will do us little good unless we get a good temper within our hearts.** You can never make a ship go steady by propping it outside; you know there must be ballast within the ship to make it go steady. So there is nothing outside us that can keep our hearts in a steady, constant way, but grace within the soul.

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

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

Therefore, when reason can go no higher, let faith get on the shoulders of reason and say, “I see land, though reason cannot see it. I see good that will come out of all this evil.” Exercise faith by often resigning yourself to God, by giving yourself up to God and His ways. The more you surrender up yourself to God in a believing way, the more peace and quiet you will have.

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

Those who are struck by a snake, it is because they tread on the ground. If they could be lifted up above the earth, they need never fear being stung by the snakes that are crawling underneath. So I may compare the sinful distemper<sup>91</sup> of murmuring to snakes that crawl back and forth below—but if we could get higher, we should not be stung by them. A heavenly conversation<sup>92</sup> is the way to contentment.

**e. Do not promise yourselves too much beforehand;** do not reckon on too great things. It is good for us to take hold very low and not think to pitch too high. Do not soar too high in your thoughts beforehand, to think, “Oh, if I had this and this,” and imagine great matters to yourselves; but be as good Jacob. You know he was a man who lived a very contented life in a mean condition, and he said, “If God...will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on” (Gen 28:20). So if we would not pitch our thoughts high and



think that we might have what others have, we would not be troubled so much when we meet with disappointments. So Paul says, “Having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1Ti 6:8).

f. **Labor to get your hearts mortified, that is, dead to the world.** We must not content ourselves that we have gotten some reasoning about the vanity of the creature, and such things as these; but we must exercise mortification (Rom 8:13) and be crucified to the world (Gal 6:14). We should “die daily” to the world (1Co 15:31). We are baptized into the death of Christ (Rom 6:3) to signify that we profess to be even as dead men to the world. Now, no crosses that fall out in the world trouble those who are dead! If our hearts were dead to the world we should not be much troubled with the changes of the world or the tossings about of worldly things.

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

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

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

i. **Be not inordinately taken up with the comforts of this world when you have them.** It is a certain rule: however inordinate any man or woman is in sorrow when a comfort is taken from them, so were they immoderate in their rejoicing in the comfort when they had it.