

Christian Contentment

Based on *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* by Jeremiah Burroughs (1646)

Session 3: The Evils and Murmuring and Discontented Hearts

The Evils of Murmuring

Burroughs describes *murmuring* [grumbling] as complaining, disquietness, an unsettled heart. It does not need to be *outward*; God knows the heart, and he knows if we harbor resentment, bitterness, and discontent.

1. Murmuring reveals corruption in the soul.

"If a man's body is of such a temper that every scratch of a pin makes his flesh to rankle [aggravate, inflame] and be a sore, you will surely say, this man's body is very corrupt, his blood and his flesh is corrupt, that every scratch of a pin shall make it rankle. So it is in your spirit, if every little trouble and affliction makes you discontented, and makes you murmur, and even causes your spirit within you to rankle. Or like a wound in a man's body, the evil of the wound is not so much in the largeness of it, and the abundance of blood that comes out of it, but in the inflammation that there is in it, or in a fretting and corrupting humor that is in the wound."

2. Murmuring is described by God as an especially wicked sin.

*"It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These are **grumblers, malcontents**, following their own sinful desires; they are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage."* (Jude 14-16)

"You had need to look to your spirits; you may see that this murmuring, which is the vice contrary to this contentment, is not as small a matter as you think. You think you are not as ungodly as others, because you do not swear and drink as others do, but you may be ungodly in murmuring."

3. Murmuring is counted as *rebellion*.

But on the next day all the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the Lord." (Numbers 16:41)

*And the Lord said to Moses, "Put back the staff of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept as a sign for the **rebels**, that you may make an end of their grumblings against me, lest they die."* (Numbers 17:10)

"So you see that to be a murmurer, and to be a rebel, in Scripture phrase is all one; it is rebellion against God. Just as it is the beginning of rebellion and sedition in a kingdom, when the people are discontented. When discontent comes, it grows to murmuring, and you can go into no house almost, but there is murmuring when men are discontented, so that within a little while it breaks forth into sedition or rebellion. Murmuring is but as the smoke of the fire: there is first a smoke and smouldering before the flame breaks forth; and so before open rebellion in a kingdom there is first a smoke of murmuring, and then it breaks forth into open rebellion. But because it has the seeds of rebellion, it is accounted before the Lord to be rebellion."

4. Murmuring is contrary to God's grace.

"If you could but obtain so much liberty of your own spirits as to look back to see what the work of God was in converting you, there is nothing would prevail more than to think of that. I am now in a murmuring, discontented way, but how did I feel my soul working when God turned my soul to himself! Oh, how opposite is this to that work, and how unbecoming! Oh, what shame and confusion would come upon the spirits of men and women, if they could but compare the work of corruption in their murmuring and discontent with the work of God that was upon their souls in conversion!"

5. Murmuring is *exceedingly below* a Christian.

The relation of a Christian to 1. God, as a child; 2. Christ, as a bride; 3. Christ's body, as a member; 4. Christ's inheritance, as a co-heir; 5. The Spirit, as his temple; 6. the saints, as a family member; 7. The world and sin, as dead.

6. Murmuring undoes our prayers.

"When you come to pray to God, you acknowledge his sovereignty over you, you come there to profess yourselves to be at God's disposal. What do you pay for, unless you acknowledge that you are at his disposal? Unless you will stand, as it were, at his disposal never come to petition him. If you will come to petition him and yet will be your own carver you go contrary to your prayers, to come as if you would beg your bread at your Father's gates every day, and yet you must do what you list: this is the undoing of the prayers of a Christian."

7. Murmuring has several woeful effects.

1. Loss of time; 2. Unthankfulness; 3. Unfitting for service; 4. Shifting in spirit; 5. Bringing misery on yourself

8. Murmuring is foolishness.

1. It takes away present comfort; 2. You gain nothing by it; 3. It creates an "unseemly" attitude; 4. It takes from the sweetness of mercy; 5. It makes the affliction *worse!*

9. Murmuring provokes God's wrath.

And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me? I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel, which they grumble against me. Say to them, 'As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me (Numbers 14:26-29)

"Mark, God swears against a murmurer. Sometimes in your discontent perhaps you will be ready to swear. Do you swear in your discontent? So does God swear against you for your discontent."

"You who are discontented lift up your hearts against God, and you cause God to lift up his hand against you. Perhaps God lays his finger on you softly in some afflictions, in your families or elsewhere, and you cannot bear the hand of God, which lies upon you as tenderly as a tender-hearted nurse lays her hand on a child. You cannot bear the tender hand of God which is upon you in a lesser affliction; it would be just for God to lift up his hand against you in another kind of affliction. Oh, a murmuring spirit provokes God exceedingly."

10. Murmuring has a Satanic spirit.

"The Devil is the most discontented creature in the world, he is the proudest creature that is, and the most discontented creature, and the most dejected creature. Now, therefore, so much discontent as you have, so much of the spirit of Satan you have. It was the unclean spirit that went up and down and found no rest; so when a man or woman's spirit has no rest, it is a sign that it has much of the unclean spirit, of the spirit of Satan, and you should think with yourself, Oh, Lord, have I the spirit of Satan upon me? Satan is the most discontented spirit that is, and oh! how much of his spirit have upon me who can find no rest at all?"

11. Murmuring invites God to release his hand from us.

"What is God should say to any of you, If my care over you does not please you, then take care of yourselves, if my protection over you will not please you, then protect yourselves? Now all things that befall you, befall you through a providence of God, and if you are those who belong to God, there is a protection of God over you, and a care of God. If God were to say, 'Well, you shall not have the benefit of my protection any longer, and I will take no further care of you', would not this be a most dreadful judgment of God from Heaven upon you? Take heed what you do then in being discontented with God's will towards you, for, indeed, on account of discontent this may befall you."

The Excuses of Discontented Hearts

1. "It is not discontent, it is a sense of my condition."

"There is no sense of any affliction that will hinder the sense of God's mercies. Nay, the more we are sensible of our afflictions, providing it is in a gracious manner, the more sensible we will be of God's mercy. But you are so sensible of your affliction that it takes away the sense of all your mercies. Oh, this is sinful discontent, this is not to be sensible in a wicked way, you go beyond your bounds. By this rule you may come to know when your sorrows and troubles for your afflictions go beyond the bounds. We may be sorrowful when God afflicts, but, oh, that I might know when my sorrow goes beyond the bounds of it! Truly, you may know it by this, does the sense of your

afflictions take away the sense of your mercies? If it does, then it goes beyond the bounds."

2. "It is not affliction, but my sin!"

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

1. They were never troubled before by their sin; 2. If it's your sin and not your affliction, you would be content if the sin were removed but not the affliction; 3. You would not add trouble to your sin (by grumbling); 4. If it's your sin, then all the more you should humble yourself under God's hand, accepting his discipline.

3. "God has withdrawn himself from me."

And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Exodus 17:7)

"It is a very evil thing for men and women over every affliction to conclude that God is departed from them. It may be, when it comes to be examined, there is no other reason why you think that God is withdrawn and departed, but because he afflicts you. Now for you to make such a conclusion, that every time God lays an affliction upon you, he is departed, is a sinful disorder of your heart, and is very dishonorable to God, and grievous to his Spirit."

4. "I can bear it if it's from God, but not if it's from others."

"Though they are men who bring this cross on you, yet they are God's instruments. God has a hand in it, and they can go no further than God would have them go."

"If this is your trouble that men do so wrong you, you ought rather to turn your hearts to pity them, than to murmur or be discontented. For the truth is, if you are wronged by other men, you have the better of it, for it is better to bear wrong than to do wrong a great deal."

5. "It is an affliction I never asked for."

And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. (Acts 20:22-23)

"So a Christian should do: he should look for afflictions wheresoever he is, in all conditions he should look to meet with afflictions; and therefore if any affliction should befall him, though indeed he could not foresee the particular evil, yet he should think, This is no more than I looked for in general. Therefore no affliction should come unexpectedly to a Christian."

6. "My affliction is exceedingly great."

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

"It might have been a great deal more, you might have been in Hell."

"It may be it is the greater because your heart murmurs so."

7. "My affliction is greater than the afflictions of others."

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

"If it were greater than others', why is your eye evil because the eye of God is good? Why should you be discontented the more because God is gracious to others?"

"If your affliction greater than others, Then in this you have an opportunity to honor God more than others."

8. "God placed me in a position that makes me useless to serve."

"It is a good sign of grace for a man to account afflictions as great because he can do the Lord but little service. Few men account that an affliction at all. But yet there may be a temptation in this. To murmur at God's disposal, when your calling is low and mean and you can do little service, is many times a temptation to those who are poor, those who are servants and those who are of weak gifts, and must work hard to provide bread for their families. It is many times a grievous burden to them to think: The Lord uses other men in public service and I live in an obscure way, and to what purpose is my life?"

"Though your outward calling is low in respect of men, yet in respect of God you are in the same calling with the

angels in Heaven, and in some degree called to that which is higher, for the Scripture says that the angels come to understand the mystery of the Gospel by the Church."

"For when the Lord comes to reward, he does not examine what work men and women have been exercised in, but what their faithfulness has been."

9. "I could bear it if I hadn't been brought so low from where I was."

"For is your eye evil because God has been good to you heretofore? It is a bad thing for us to have our eye evil because God is good to others, but to look upon our condition with an evil eye now, because God was once good to us!-has God done you any wrong because he was formerly more good to you than he was to others?"

"Did God give you more prosperity before? It was to prepare you for affliction. We should look at all our outward prosperity as a preparation for afflictions. If you had done so, then it would not have been so difficult for you to endure afflictions now. If when you had great wealth, you made use of the mercy of God to prepare you for your afflicted estate, then the change of your estate would not be so grievous. Every Christian should say: 'Have I wealth now? I should prepare for poverty. Have I health now? I should prepare for sickness. Have I liberty? Let me prepare myself for imprisonment. How do I know what God may call me to? Have I comfort and peace now in my conscience, does God shine upon me? While I have this let me prepare for God's withdrawing from me. Am I delivered from temptations? Let me prepare now for the time of temptations.' If you would do so, the change of your condition would not be so grievous to you.

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

10. "I tried to alleviate the affliction too many times and in too many ways."

"There will be more testimony of your love to God, if so be that you now yield up yourself to God in what cost you dear. 'Shall I offer that to God', said David, 'that cost me nothing?' Your outward comforts have cost you much, and you have taken great pains to obtain them and now, if you can submit to God in the want of them, in this, I say, your love is the more shown, that you can offer to God what cost you dear."

11. "At least I'm not breaking out in discontent."

"Oh, do not satisfy yourselves with that, for the disorders of your hearts, and their sinful workings are as words before God. 'My soul, be silent to God': we spoke of that in the beginning of the expounding of this Scripture. It is not enough for your tongue to be silent; but your soul must be silent. There may be a sullen discontentedness of heart as well as a discontentedness manifested in words, and if you do not mortify that inward sullenness, when you are afflicted a little more, it will break forth at last. And thus the Lord, I hope, has met with the chief reasonings and please for our discontent in our conditions. I beseech you, in the name of God, consider these things, and because they concern your own hearts, you may so much the better remember them."