

CONTENTMENT

NO. 320

A SERMON
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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK.

“For I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.”
Philippians 4:11. (NKJV)

THE apostle Paul was a very learned man, but not the least among his manifold acquisitions in science was this—he had learned to be content. Such learning is far better than much that is acquired in the schools. Their learning may look studiously back on the past, but too often those who cull the relics of antiquity with enthusiasm are thoughtless about the present, and neglect the practical duties of daily life. Their learning may open up dead languages to those who will never derive any living benefit from them. Far better the learning of the apostle! It was a thing of ever-present utility and alike serviceable for all generations—one of the rarest—but one of the most desirable accomplishments. I put the senior wrangler and the most learned of our Cambridge men in the lowest form, compared with this learned apostle, for this surely is the highest degree in *humanities* to which a man can possibly attain—to have learned in whatever state he is—to be content. You will see at once from reading the text, upon the very surface, that contentment in all states is not a natural propensity of man. Ill weeds grow apace—covetousness, discontent, and murmuring—are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil. You have no need to sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are native to earth, upon which rests the curse. So you have no need to teach men to complain, they complain fast enough without any education. But the precious things of the earth must be cultivated. If we would have wheat, we must plow and sow; if we want flowers, there must be the garden and all the gardener’s care. Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, it must be cultivated! It will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature, alone, that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the divine grace which God has sown in it. Paul says, “I have *learned* to be content;” as much as to say he did not know how at one time. It cost him some pains to attain to the mystery of that great truth of God. No doubt he sometimes thought he had learned and then broke down. Frequently too, like boys at school, he had his knuckles rapped; frequently he found that it was not easy learning this task, and when at last he had attained unto it and could say, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content,” he was an old gray-headed man upon the borders of the grave—a poor prisoner shut up in Nero’s dungeon at Rome.

We, my brothers and sisters, might well be willing to endure Paul’s infirmities and share the cold dungeon with him, if we, too, might by any means attain unto such a degree of contentment. Do not indulge, any of you, the silly notion that you can be contented without *learning*, or learn without discipline; it is not a power that may be exercised naturally, but a science to be acquired gradually! The very words of the text might suggest this, even if we did not know it from experience. We need not be taught to rumor, but we must be taught to acquiesce in the will and good pleasure of the Lord our God.

When the apostle had uttered these words, he immediately gave a commentary upon them. Read the 12th verse, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”

Notice first, that the apostle said he knew how to be *abased*. A wonderful knowledge this is! When all men honor us, then we may very well be content; but when the finger of scorn is pointed at us, when our character is held in ill repute, and men hiss us by the wayside, it requires much gospel knowledge to be able to endure that with patience and with cheerfulness. When we are increasing and growing in rank, and honor, and human esteem, it is easy work to be contented; but when we have to say with John the

Baptist, “I must decrease,” or when we see some other servant advanced to our place and another man bearing the palm we had longed to hold, it is not easy to sit still, and without an envious feeling cry with Moses, “Would to God that all the Lord’s servants were prophets.” To hear another man praised at your own expense, to find your own virtues made as a foil to set forth the superior excellence of some new rival—this, I say, is beyond human nature—to be able to bear it with joy and thankfulness and to bless God! There must be something noble in the heart of the man who is able to lay all his honors down as willingly as he took them up, when he can as cheerfully submit himself to Christ to humble him, as to lift him up and seat him upon a throne. And yet, my brothers and sisters, we have not, anyone of us, learned what the apostle knew, if we are not as ready to glorify Christ by shame, by humiliation and by reproach, as by honor and by esteem among men. We must be ready to give up everything for Him. We must be willing to go downwards, in order that Christ’s name may ascend upwards and be the better known and glorified among men. “I know how to be abased,” says the apostle.

His second piece of knowledge is equally valuable, “I know how to *abound*.” There are a great many men, who know a *little* about how to be abased, who do not know at all how to abound! When they are put down into the pit with Joseph, they look up and see the starry promise, and they hope for an escape; but when they are put on the top of a pinnacle, their heads grow dizzy, and they are ready to fall! When they were poor they used to battle it, as one of our great national poets has said—

*“Yet many things, impossible to thought,
Have been by need, to full perfection brought.
The daring of the soul proceeds from thence,
Sharpness of wit and active diligence;
Prudence at once and fortitude it gives;
And, if in patience taken, mends our lives.”*

But mark the same men after success has crowned their struggles. Their troubles are over; they are rich and increased with goods. And have you not often seen a man who has sprung up from nothing to wealth—how purse-proud he becomes, how vain, how intolerant? Nobody would have thought that man ever kept a shop! You would not believe that man at any time ever used to sell a pound of candles, would you? He is so great in his own eyes, that one would have thought the blood of all the Caesars must flow in his veins! He does not know his old acquaintances. The familiar friend of other days he now passes by with scarcely a nod of recognition. The man does not know how to abound; he has grown proud; he is exalted above measure! There have been men who have been lifted up for a season to popularity in the church. They have preached successfully and done some mighty work. For this the people have honored them, and rightly so. But then they have become tyrants; they have lusted after authority; they have looked down contemptuously upon everybody else, as if other men were small pigmies and they were huge giants! Their conduct has been intolerable, and they have soon been cast down from their high places, because they did not know how to abound. There was once a square piece of paper put up into George Whitefield’s pulpit, by way of a notice, to this effect—“A young man who has lately inherited a large fortune, requests the prayers of the congregation.” Right well was the prayer asked, for when we go up the hill, we need prayer that we may be kept steady. Going down the hill of fortune, there is not half the fear of stumbling. The Christian far oftener disgraces his profession in prosperity than when he is being abased. There is another danger—the danger of growing *worldly*. When a man finds that his wealth increases, it is amazing how gold will stick to his fingers! The man who had just enough thought if he had more than he required, he would be exceedingly generous; with a shilling purse he had a guinea heart—but now with a guinea purse, he has a shilling heart! He finds that the money adheres and he cannot get it off. You have heard of the spider that is called a “money spinner.” I do not know why it is called so, except that it is one of the sort of spiders you cannot get off your fingers. It gets on one hand, then on the other hand, then on your sleeve; it is here and there. You cannot get rid of it unless you crush it outright—so is it with many who *abound*.

Gold is a good thing when put to use—the strength, the sinews of commerce and of charity—but it is a bad thing in the heart and begets “foul-cankering rust.” Gold is a good thing to stand on, but a bad thing to have about one’s loins, or over one’s head. It matters not, though it is precious earth with which

a man is buried alive. Oh, how many Christians have there been who seemed as if they were destroyed by their wealth! What leanness of soul and neglect of spiritual things have been brought on through the very mercies and bounties of God! Yet this is not a matter of necessity, for the apostle Paul tells us that he knew how to abound. When he had much, he knew how to use it. He had asked of God that he might be kept humble—that when he had a full sail he might have plenty of ballast—that when his cup ran over he might not let it run to waste—that in his time of plenty he might be ready to give to those who needed—and that as a faithful steward he might hold all he had at the disposal of his Lord. This is divine learning. “I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound.” The apostle goes on to say, “Everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry.” It is a divine lesson, let me say, to know how to be full; for the Israelites were full once, and while the flesh was yet in their mouths the wrath of God came upon them! And there have been many who have asked for mercies that they might satisfy their own heart’s lust. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” Fullness of bread has often made fullness of blood, and that has brought on wantonness of spirit! When men have too much of God’s mercies—strange that we should have to say this, and yet it is a great fact—when men have much of God’s providential mercies—it often happens that they have but little of God’s grace and little gratitude for the bounties they have received! They are full and they forget God. Satisfied with earth, they are content to do without heaven. Rest assured, my dear hearers, it is harder to know how to be full than it is to know how to be hungry. To know how to be hungry is a sharp lesson, but to know how to be full is the harder lesson after all. So desperate is the tendency of human nature to pride and forgetfulness of God! As soon as ever we have a double stock of manna and begin to hoard it, it breeds worms and becomes a stench in the nostrils of God! Take care that you ask in your prayers that God would teach you how to be full.

The apostle knew still further how to experience the two extremes of fullness and hunger. What a trial that is, to have one day a path strewn with mercies, and the next day to find the soil beneath you barren of every comfort. I can readily imagine the poor man being contented in his poverty, for he has been accustomed to it. He is like a bird that has been born in a cage and does not know what liberty means. But for a man who has had much of this world’s goods and thus has been full—to be brought to absolute penury—he is like the bird that once soared on highest wing, but is now encaged. Those poor larks you sometimes see in the shops always seem as if they would be looking up and they are constantly pecking at the wires, fluttering their wings and wanting to fly away. So will it be with you unless grace prevents it. If you have been rich and are brought down to be poor, you will find it hard to know “how to be hungry.” Indeed, my brethren, it must be a sharp lesson. We sometimes complain of the poor, that they murmur. Ah, we would murmur a great deal more than they do, if their lot fell to us! To sit down at the table where there is nothing to eat and five or six little children crying for bread, were enough to break the father’s heart. Or for the mother, when her husband has been carried to the tomb—to gaze round on the gloom-stricken home—press her new-born infant to her bosom and look upon the others, with widowed heart remembering that they are without a father to seek their livelihood. Oh, it must need much grace to know how to be hungry! And for the man who has lost his job and has been walking all over London—perhaps a thousand miles—to get a position and he cannot get one, to come home and know that when he faces his wife, her first question will be “Have you brought home any bread?” “Have you found anything to do?” and to have to tell her “No. There have been no doors open to me.” It is hard to prove hunger and bear it patiently. I have had to admire and look with a sort of reverence on some of the members of this church, when I have happened to hear afterwards of their privations. They would not tell anyone, and they would not come to me; but they endured their pangs in secret, struggled heroically through all their difficulties and dangers and came out more than conquerors. Ah, brothers and sisters, it looks an easy lesson when you come to see it in a book, but it is not quite so easy when you come to put it in practice! It is hard to know how to be full, but it is a sharp thing to know how to be hungry. Our apostle had learned both—both “how to abound and to suffer need.”

Having thus expounded to you the apostle Paul’s own commentary, in enlarging upon the words of my text, let me return to the passage itself. You may now ask by what course of study did he acquire this

peaceful frame of mind? And of one thing we may be quite certain—it was by no stoic process of self-government but simply and exclusively *by faith in the Son of God!*

You may easily imagine a nobleman whose home is the abode of luxury traveling through foreign parts for purposes of scientific discovery, or going forth to command some military expedition in the service of his country. In either case he may be well content with his fare and feel that there is nothing to repine at. And why? Because he had no right to expect anything better; not because it bore any comparison with his rank, his fortune, or his social position at home. So our apostle. He had said, “Our conversation or citizenship is in heaven.” Traveling through earth as a pilgrim and stranger, he was content to take travelers fare. Or entering the battle field, he had no ground of complaint that perils and distresses should sometimes encircle his path, while at other times a truce gave him some peaceful and pleasing intervals.

Again—calling attention to the text, you will notice that the word, “therewith,” [KJV] is written in italics. If therefore we do not omit it, we need not lay upon it a heavy stress in the interpretation. There is nothing in hunger, or thirst, or nakedness, or peril to invite our contentment. If we are content under such circumstances, it must be from higher motives than our condition itself affords. Hunger is a sharp thorn when in the hands of stern necessity. But hunger may be voluntarily endured for many an hour when conscience makes a man willing to fast. Reproach may have a bitter fang, but it can be bravely endured when I am animated by a sense of the justice of my cause. Now Paul counted that all the ills which befell him were just incident to the service of his Lord. So for the love he had for the name of Jesus, the hardships of servitude or self-mortification sat lightly on his shoulders and were brooked cheerily by his heart.

There is yet a third reason why Paul was content. I will illustrate it. Many an old veteran takes great pleasure in recounting the dangers and sufferings of his past life. He looks back with more than contentment, oftentimes with self-gratulation, upon the terrible dangers and distresses of his heroic career. But the smile that lights his eyes, and the pride that sits on his lofty wrinkled brow as he recounts his stories, were not there when he was in the midst of the scenes he is now describing! It is only since the dangers are *past* that the fears have subsided, and the issue is complete, that his enthusiasm has been kindled to a flame. But Paul stood on vantage ground here. “*In all these things,*” he said, “we are more than conquerors.” Witness his voyage toward Rome. When the ship in which he sailed was caught and driven before a tempestuous wind; when darkness veiled the skies; when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared; when hope failed every heart—he alone bore up with manly courage! And why? The angel of God stood by him and said, Fear not. His faith was *predestinarian*, and as such he had as much peaceful contentment in his breast while the tribulation lasted as when it had closed!

And now I want to commend the lesson of my text very briefly to the rich, a little more at length to the poor and then with sympathy and counsel to the *sick*—those who are sorely tried in their persons by suffering.

First, to the RICH. The apostle Paul says, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.” Now some of you have, as far as your circumstances are concerned, all that the heart can wish. God has placed you in such a position that you have not to toil with your hands, and in the sweat of your face gain a livelihood. You will perhaps think that any exhortation to you to be contented is needless. Alas, my brothers and sisters, a man may be very discontented though he is very rich! It is quite as possible for discontent to sit on the throne, as it is to sit on a chair—a poor broken-backed chair in a hovel. Remember that a man’s contentment is in his *mind*, not in the extent of his possessions. Alexander, with the entire world at his feet, cries for another world to conquer! He is sorry because there are not other countries into which he may carry his victorious arms and wade up to his loins in the blood of his fellow men—to slake the thirst of his insatiable ambition. To you who are rich, it is necessary that we give the same exhortation as to the poor—“Learn to be content.” Many a rich man who has an estate is not satisfied because there is a little corner-piece of ground that belongs to his neighbor, like Naboth’s vineyard that the king of Israel needed that he might make a garden of herbs by his palace. “What does it matter,” he says, “though I have all these acres, unless I can have Naboth’s vineyard?” Surely a king should have been ashamed to crave that paltry half-acre of a poor man’s inheritance! But yet so it is—men with vast

estates which they are scarcely able to ride over, may have that old horseleech in their hearts, which always cries, "Give, give! More, more!" They thought when they had but little, that if they had ten thousand pounds it would be enough. They have it—they need twenty thousand pounds! When they have that, they still want more. Yes, and if you had it, it would be, "A trifle more!" So would it continually be; as your possessions increased, so would the host of acquiring property increase. We must, then, press upon the rich this exhortation—"Learn in your state, to be content."

Besides, there is another danger that frequently awaits the rich man. When he has enough wealth and property, he has not always enough honor. If the queen would but make him a justice of the peace for the county, how glorious would my lord become! That done, he will never be satisfied till he is a knight! And if he were a knight, he would never be content until he became a baron! And my lord would never be satisfied till he was an earl. Nor would he even then be quite content unless he could be a duke. Nor would he be quite satisfied, I think then, unless there would be a kingdom for him somewhere! Men are not easily satisfied with honor. The world may bow down at a man's feet; then he will ask the world to get up and bow again and so keep on bowing forever; for the lust of honor is impossible to satisfy. Man must be honored and though king Ahasuerus makes Haman the first man in the empire, yet all this availed nothing, as long as Mordecai in the gate does not bow down to my lord Haman! Oh, learn, brothers and sisters, in whatever state you are, to be content!

And here, let me speak to the elders and deacons of this church. Brothers, learn to be content with the office you hold, not envious of any superior honor to exalt yourselves. I turn to myself. I turn to the ministry, I turn to all of us in our ranks and degrees in Christ's Church—we must be content with the honor God is pleased to confer upon us! No, let us think *nothing* of honor, but be content to give it all up, knowing that it is but a puff of breath after all. Let us be willing to be the servants of the church and to serve them for nothing; if necessary, even without the reward of their thanks, if we but receive, at last, the right good sentence from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ! We must learn, in whatever state we are, to be content.

At a little more length I have to counsel the POOR. "I have learned," says the apostle, "in whatever state I am to be content."

A very large number of my present congregation belongs to those who labor hard, and who, perhaps, without any unkindly reflection, may be put down in the catalogue of the poor. They have enough—barely enough and sometimes they are even reduced to straitness. Now remember, my dear Friends, you who are poor, there are two sorts of poor people in the world. There are the Lord's poor and there are the devil's poor. As for the devil's poor—they become pauperized by their own idleness, their own vice, their own extravagance. I have nothing to say to them tonight. There is another class, the Lord's poor. They are poor through trying providences, poor, but industrious—*laboring* to find all things honest in the sight of all men, but yet they still continue through an inscrutable providence to be numbered with the poor and needy. You will excuse me, brothers and sisters, in exhorting you to be contented and yet, why should I ask excuse, since it is but a part of my office to stir you up to everything that is pure and lovely and of good report? I beseech you, in your humble sphere, cultivate contentment! Be not idle. Seek, if you can, by superior skill, steady perseverance and temperate thriftiness, to raise your position. Be not so extravagant as to live entirely without care or carefulness, for he who provides not for his own household with careful forethought, is worse than a heathen and a publican! But at the same time, be contented; and where God has placed you, strive to adorn that position—give thanks to Him and bless His name.

And shall I give you some reasons for so doing? Remember, that if you are poor in this world, so was your Lord. A Christian is a believer who has fellowship with Christ—but a poor Christian has in his poverty a special vein of fellowship with Christ opened up to him! Your Master wore a peasant's garb, spoke a peasant's brogue. His companions were the toiling fishermen; He was not one who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. He knew what it was to be hungry and thirsty—no, He was poorer than you—for He had not where to lay His head. Let this console you; why should a disciple be above his Master, or a servant above his Lord? In your poverty, moreover, you are capable of communion with Christ. You can say, "Was Christ poor? Now I can sympathize with Him in

His poverty. Was He weary, and did He sit thus on the well? I am weary, too, and I can have fellowship with Christ in that sweat which He wiped from His brow.” Some of your brethren cannot go the length you can. It were wrong of them to attempt to do it, for *voluntary* poverty is voluntary wickedness; but inasmuch as God has made you poor, you have a facility for walking with Christ, where others cannot. You can go with Him through all the depths of care and woe and follow Him almost into the wilderness of temptation, when you are in your straits and difficulties for lack of bread. Let this always cheer and comfort you and make you happy in your poverty, because your Lord and Master is able to sympathize as well as to succor.

Permit me to remind you, again, that you should be contented because otherwise you will belie your own prayers. You kneel down in the morning and you say, “Your will be done!” Suppose you get up and want your own will and rebel against the dispensation of your heavenly Father—have you not made yourself out to be a hypocrite? The language of your prayer is at variance with the feeling of your heart; let it always be sufficient for you to think that you are where God put you. Have you not heard the story of the heroic boy on board the burning ship? When his father told him to stand in a certain part of the vessel, he would not move till his father bade him, but stood still when the ship was on fire. Though warned of his danger, he held his ground. Until his father told him to move, there would he stay. The ship was blown up and he perished in his fidelity! And shall a child be more faithful to an earthly parent than we are to our Father who is in heaven? He has ordered everything for our good and can He be forgetful of us? Let us believe that whatever He appoints is best. Let us choose rather His will than our own. If there were two places, one a place of poverty and another a place of riches and honor—if I could have my choice, it should be my privilege to say, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

Another reflection suggests itself. If you are poor, you should be well content with your position, because, depend upon it, it is the fittest for you. Unerring wisdom cast your lot. If you were rich, you would not have as much grace as you have now. Perhaps God knew that if He did not make you poor, He would never get you to heaven at all, and so He has kept you where you are, that He may conduct you there. Suppose there is a ship of large tonnage to be brought up a river and in one part of the river there is a shallow. Should someone ask, “Why does the captain steer his vessel through the deep part of the channel?” His answer would be, “Because I should not get it into harbor at all if I did not take it by this course.” So, it may be, you would remain aground and suffer shipwreck if your Divine Captain did not always make you trace the deepest part of the water and make you go where the current ran with the greatest speed. Some plants die if they are too much exposed; it may be that you are planted in some sheltered part of the garden where you do not get as much sun as you would like, but you are put there as a plant of His own righteous planting, that you may bring forth fruit unto perfection. Remember this—had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, God would have put you there! You are put by Him in the most suitable place and if you had had the picking of your lot half an hour afterwards, you would have come back and said, “Lord, choose for me, for I have not chosen the best, after all.” You have heard, perhaps, the old fable in Aesop, of the men that complained to Jupiter of their burdens, and the god in anger bade them, everyone, get rid of his burden and take the one he would like best. They all came and proposed to do so. There was a man who had a lame leg and he thought he could do better if he had a blind eye. The man who had a blind eye thought he could do better if he had to bear poverty and not blindness, while the man who was poor, thought poverty the worst of ills. He would not mind taking the sickness of the rich man if he could but have his riches. So they all made a change. But the fable said that within an hour they were all back, again, asking that they might have their own burdens—they found the original burden so much lighter than the one that was taken by their own selection! So would you find it. Then be content; you cannot better your lot. Take up your cross; you could not have a better trial than you have; it is the best for you; it sifts you the most; it will do you the most good, and prove the most effective means of making you perfect in every good word and work to the glory of God!

And surely, my dear brothers and sisters, if I need to add another argument why you should be content, it were this—whatever your trouble, it is *not for long*. You may have no estate on earth, but you have a large one in heaven, and perhaps that estate in heaven will be all the larger by reason of the pov-

erty you have had to endure here below. You may have scarcely a house to cover your head, but you have a mansion in heaven—a house not made with hands! Your head may often lie without a pillow, but it shall one day wear a crown! Your hands may be blistered with toil, but they shall sweep the strings of golden harps; you may often have to go home to a dinner of herbs, but there you shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God and sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb—

“The way may be rough, but it cannot be long!

So we’ll smooth it with hope and cheer it with song!”

Yet a little while, the painful conflict will be over. Courage, beloved, courage—glittering robes for conquerors! Courage, my brothers and sisters, courage, you may sooner become rich than you dream of—perhaps there is even now, but a step between you and your inheritance! You may go home, perhaps, shivering in the cold March wind; but before morning dawns you may be in your Master’s bosom! Bear up with your lot, then; bear up with it! Let not the child of the King, who has an estate beyond the stars, murmur as others do. You are not so poor, after all, as they are who have no hope. Though you seem poor, you are rich! Do not let your poor neighbors see you disconsolate, but let them see in you that holy calmness, that sweet resignation, that gracious submission, which makes the poor man more glorious than he who wears a coronet and lifts the son of the soil up from his rustic habitation and sets him among the princes of the blood-royal of heaven! Be happy, beloved, be satisfied and content! God will have you to learn, in whatever state you may be, to be content.

And now, just one or two words to SUFFERERS: All men are born to sorrow, but some men are born to a double portion of it. As among trees, so among men, there are different classes. The cypress seems to have been created especially to stand at the grave’s head and be a weeper. And there are some men and some women who seem to have been made on purpose that they might weep. They are the Jeremiahs of our race; they do not often know an hour free from pain. Their poor weary bodies have dragged along through a miserable life, diseased, perhaps, even from their birth; suffering some sorrowful infirmity that will not let them know even the gaiety and the frolic of youth. They grow up to mourning and each year’s suffering drives its plowshare deeper into their brows and they are apt—and who can blame them?—they are apt to murmur and say, “Why am I thus? I cannot enjoy the pleasures of life as others can. Why is it?” “Oh,” says some poor sister, “consumption has looked on me; that fell disease has bleached my cheeks. Why should I have to come, scarcely able to breathe, up to the house of God and after sitting here, exhausted with the heat of this crowded sanctuary, retire to my home and prepare to engage in daily labor much too heavy for me? My very bed does not yield me repose, and my nights are seared with visions and frightened with dreams—why is this?” I say if these brothers and sisters mourn, we are not the men to blame them, because, when we are sick, we murmur more than they! I do admire patience, because I feel myself so incapable of it. When I see a man suffering and suffering bravely, I often feel small in his presence. I am amazed, yes, I admire and love the man who can bear pain and say so little about it—we who are naturally healthy and strong—when we suffer, we can hardly endure it. Caesar pulses like a sick girl and so do some of the strongest when they are brought down! While those who are always enduring suffering bear it like heroes—martyrs to pain, and yet not uttering a complaint! There was good John Calvin, all his life a victim of sickness. He was a complication of diseases. His visage, when he was a young man, as may, indeed, be judged of from the different portraits of him, exhibited the signs of decay; and though he lived a long while, he seemed as if he were always going to die tomorrow. In the deepest of his agony, suffering from severe spinal pains and acute disease, the only cry he was ever known to utter was, “*Domine usquequo?*—How long, Lord? How long, Lord?” A more repining expression than that he never used. Ah, but we get to kicking against the pricks, murmuring and complaining. Brothers and sisters, the exhortation to you is to be content! Your pains are sharp, yet, “His strokes are fewer than your crimes, and lighter than your guilt.” From the pains of hell Christ has delivered you! Why should a living man complain? As long as you are out of hell, gratitude should mingle with your groans!

Besides, remember that all these sufferings are less than His sufferings. “Can you not watch with your Lord one hour?” He hangs upon the tree with a world’s miseries in His heart; cannot you bear these lesser miseries that fall on you? Remember that all these chastenings work for your good; they are all

making you ready—every stroke of your Father’s rod is bringing you nearer to perfection! The flame does not hurt you—it only refines you and takes away your dross. Remember, too, that your pain and sickness have been so greatly blessed to you already, that you never ought to rebel. “Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I have kept Your word.” You have seen more of heaven through your sickness than you could ever have seen if you had been well. When we are well, we are like men in a clay hut; we cannot see much light. But when disease comes and shakes the hut, and dashes down the mud, and makes the walls tremble, and there is a crevice or two, the sunlight of heaven shines through! Sick men can see a great deal more of glory than men do when they are in health. This hard heart of ours, when it is undisturbed, waxes gross. When the strings of our harp are all unstrung, they make better music than when they are best wound up. There are some heaven notes that never come to us but when we are shut up in the darkened chamber. Grapes must be pressed before the wine can be distilled; furnace work is necessary to make us of any use in the world. We would be just the poorest things that can be, if we did not sometimes get sick. Perhaps you who are frequently tried and frequently pained would have been scarcely worth anything in the vineyard of Christ if it had not been for this trial of your faith! You have sharp filing, but if you had not been well filed, you would not have been an instrument fit for the Master’s use, you would have grown so rusty. If He had kept you always free from suffering, you would have been often lacking those sweet cordials which the Physician of souls administers to His fainting patients.

Be content, then; but I feel as if I hardly must say it, because I am not sick myself. When I came to you once, from the chamber of suffering, pale and thin, and sick and ill, I remember addressing you from that text, that was blessed to some far away in America—“If needs be you are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” Then I think I might very justly have said to you, “In whatever state you are, be content.” But now that I am not suffering, myself, I do not feel as if I can say it as boldly as I could then. But nevertheless, be it so, brothers and sisters, try if you can, and imitate this beloved apostle Paul. “I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.”

Before I dismiss you there is this one other sentence. You who love not Christ, remember that you are the most miserable people in the world! Though you may think yourselves happy, there is no one of us that would change places with the best of you! When we are very sick, very poor, and on the borders of the grave—if you were to step in and say to us, “Come, I will change places with you. You shall have my gold and my silver, my riches and my health,” and the like—there is not one living Christian who would change places with you. We would not stop to deliberate; we would give you our answer at once—“No, go your way and delight in what you have; but all your treasures are transient, they will soon pass away. We will keep our sufferings and you shall keep your gaudy toys.” Saints have no hell but what they suffer here on earth. Sinners will have no heaven but what they have here in this poor troublous world! We have our suffering here and our glory afterwards. You may have your glory here, but you will have your sufferings forever and ever! God grant you new hearts and right spirits, a living faith in a living Jesus, and then I would say to you as I have said to the rest—beloved, in whatever state you are, be content.

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