

The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment

In 1648 *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, by Jeremiah Burroughs was published. In 1636, before writing the book Burroughs had been removed from his pastorate as a pastor in the Church of England. He had been unwilling to do some things he had been ordered to do because he felt were contrary to what the Bible taught. As a consequence, he lost his job, his home, and his congregation. Because there was no separation of church and state, to avoid imprisonment, he escaped to Holland, in the city of Rotterdam. He lived there from 1636-1641. When he returned to England, he became a Congregationalist, a denomination that makes decisions by a congregational vote. This put him at odds with the majority of Christians living in England at the time. As a result, He was not trusted by most other Christians because of his convictions.

We will focus on the parts of the book that quote from the Bible. We will not quote much from the book Burroughs wrote. But consider the source that put these verses together in this way, Jeremiah Burroughs, who

...

- Lost his pastorate
- Lost his home
- Lived in exile
- Endured church conflict
- Pastored through a war (the civil was in England 1642-1651)
- Endured economic hardship
- Lived fear of suffering

Despite everything he had experience Burroughs was known as a patient, gentle man. Over the door of his study, he posted his motto over the door, “Difference of belief and unity of believers are not inconsistent.” When Burroughs was referring to differences of belief, he was referring to some Puritan Christians who felt they could remain in the Church of England, and others, like himself, who felt they could not.

This study will use the Bible verses Burroughs used. We will look at a few of his comments on the verses, but we will focus mostly on the Bible itself. Occasionally, we will quote some of Burroughs comments on the verses we are studying. If you'd a free copy Burroughs book you can find it on the internet as a pdf file.

https://www.monergism.com/threshold/sdg/burroughs/The_Rare_Jewel_of_Christian_Contentment_Jeremiah_Burroughs.pdf

Christian Contentment Described

Lesson 1

¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:11–13 (ESV)

Paul was in prison when he wrote this. (¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that **my imprisonment** is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by **my imprisonment**, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Philippians 1:12–14 (ESV). Very likely he was in Ephesus, where he also wrote the letters to the Corinthians. He was probably facing a judicial hearing that would decide whether he would be executed or released.

Jeremiah Burroughs points out: Paul’s “heart was taken up with better things.... Contentment in every condition is a great art, a spiritual mystery. It is to be learned, and to be learned as a mystery.” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 6). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.) Notice that in verse 11 Paul says, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.”

Let’s take a closer look at the word, “learned”, in verse 12, where Paul says, “I have learned the secret.” In Greek, the original language of Paul’s letter, this word means that a secret mystery has been discovered and has now been learned and understood. Paul claims that he now understands this secret. A different word from Greek is also translated as “learned” in verse 11, where the word refers more to what we might call “head knowledge” or “skill”. Paul is claiming that he has discovered the skill of true contentment.

How can we use Paul’s instruction so that we can also learn Christian Contentment? Burroughs digs deeper into the meaning of the Greek word used in verse 12. “The word rendered 'content' here has great elegance and fullness of meaning in the original. In the strict sense it is only attributed to God, who has styled himself 'God all-sufficient', in that he rests fully satisfied in and with himself alone. But he is pleased freely to communicate his fullness to the creature, so that from God in Christ the saints receive 'grace for grace' (John 1:16). As a result, there is in them the same grace that is in Christ, according to their measure. In this sense, Paul says, I have a self-sufficiency, which is what the word means.” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 7). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.)

So, we have a puzzle before us. If only God can be self-sufficient, because only God was not created, then how can we be self-sufficient? And, if we can't be self-sufficient, how can we be content?

Let’s try to answer this question, “How can we learn to be content?” First, we cannot become self-sufficient, like God, because we are created and not self-sufficient. Our answer is found in scripture, in 2 Corinthians 3:5. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, (2 Corinthians 3:5 (ESV)). God who is self-sufficient, and content, is willing to share His contentment with us.

“Paul is telling us, in 2 Corinthians 3:5, ‘I find a sufficiency of satisfaction in my own heart, through the grace of Christ that is in me. Though I have not outward comforts and worldly conveniences to supply my necessities, yet I have a sufficient portion between Christ and my soul abundantly to satisfy me in every condition.’” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 7). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.).

"The doctrinal conclusion briefly is this: That to be well skilled in the mystery of Christian contentment is the duty, glory and excellence of a Christian." (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 8). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.)

Does this remind you of anything else that happens to Christians when they believe in Jesus as Savior?

There is more evidence in the Bible of this idea that God provides contentment to those who believe in Jesus as Savior.

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain,⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 1 Timothy 6:6–8 (ESV)

Not all Christians will be rich in the world, but all can be content in Christ and the knowledge that He will provide everything they need. Of course, God will be the judge of what they really need. And what are the most basic necessities of life in this world? Paul lists them in verse 8, food and clothing.

Often people are envious of what other people have. For the Christian, there is another way to react when other people have more:

⁵ Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5 (ESV)

What can Christians do to learn to be content in Christ?

²⁸ Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.¹ And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you." Ezekiel 1:28–2:1 (ESV)

"So when God casts us down, we must be content to lie till God bids us stand up, and God's Spirit enters into us to enable us to stand up." (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (pp. 30-31). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.)

How can we be patient while we wait for the moment that God will tell us it's time to move forward to what comes next?

¹⁵ Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶ "Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." Genesis 8:15–17 (ESV)

"Noah was not to come out of the Ark till God bid him. So though we be shut up in great afflictions, and we may think of this and that and the other means to come out of that affliction, yet till God opens the door, we should be willing to stay; God has put us in, and God will bring us out." (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 31). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.)

Do you think being in the ark with all those animals, closed into a water tight structure, would be pleasant? What can we learn from the example Moses?

¹⁰ For the priests bearing the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan until everything was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to tell the people, according to all that Moses had commanded Joshua. The people passed over in haste. Joshua 4:10 (ESV)

"For certainly, to reason and sense, there was a great deal of danger in staying, for the text says that the people hasted over, but the priests they must stay till the people have gone, stay till God calls them out from that place of danger." (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 32). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition).

Those in leadership need to put themselves on the line for the sake of others. They may need to make sacrifices. Where can a Christian find the strength to do that?

Christ is everything Christians need, and Christians have the presence of Christ with them wherever they go.

<p>²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20 (ESV)</p> <p>²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Matthew 18:20 (ESV)</p> <p>¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. John 14:16–18 (ESV)</p> <p>²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. John 14:23 (ESV)</p> <p>⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:4–5 (ESV)</p> <p>⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:9–11 (ESV)</p>	<p>¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? 1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)</p> <p>¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 1 Corinthians 6:19 (ESV)</p> <p>¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” 2 Corinthians 6:16 (ESV)</p> <p>¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 1 John 4:13 (ESV)</p> <p>⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test! 2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)</p> <p>²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 (ESV)</p> <p>¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, Ephesians 3:17 (ESV)</p> <p>²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27 (ESV)</p> <p>²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20 (ESV)</p>
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Which verse or verses do you find most reassuring that Christ is with you?

What is Christian contentment?

“If the attainment of true contentment were as easy as keeping quiet outwardly, it would not need much learning.” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 10). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition).

“I would unfold this further to you with this simile: To be content as a result of some external thing is like warming a man’s clothes by the fire. But to be content through an inward disposition of the soul is like the warmth that a man’s clothes have from the natural heat of the body. A man who is healthy in body puts on his clothes, and perhaps at first on a cold morning they feel cold. But after he has had them on a little while they are warm. Now, how did they get warm? They were not near the fire? No, this came from the natural heat of his body. Now when a sickly man, the natural heat of whose body has deteriorated, puts on his clothes, they do not get hot after a long time. He must warm them by the fire, and even then they will soon be cold again.” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 19). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.)

“CONTENTMENT IS FREELY SUBMITTING TO AND TAKING PLEASURE IN GOD’S DISPOSAL. Submitting to God’s disposal—What is that? The word submit signifies nothing else but ‘to send under’. Thus in one who is discontented the heart will be unruly, and would even get above God so far as discontent prevails. But now comes the grace of contentment and sends it under, for to submit is to send under a thing. Now when the soul comes to see its own unruliness—Is the hand of God bringing an affliction and yet my heart is troubled and discontented—What, it says, will you be above God? Is this not God’s hand and must your will be regarded more than God’s? O under, under! get you under, O soul! Keep under! keep low! keep under God’s feet! You are under God’s feet, and keep under his feet! Keep under the authority of God, the majesty of God, the sovereignty of God, the power that God has over you! To keep under, that is to submit. The soul can submit to God at the time when it can send itself under the power and authority and sovereignty and dominion that God has over it. That is the sixth point, but even that is not enough. You have not attained this grace of contentment unless the next point is true of you.” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (pp. 25–26). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.)

“In his submission he sees his sovereignty, but what makes him take pleasure is God’s wisdom. The Lord knows how to order things better than I. The Lord sees further than I do; I only see things at present but the Lord sees a great while from now. And how do I know but that had it not been for this affliction, I should have been undone. I know that the love of God may as well stand with an afflicted condition as with a prosperous condition. There are reasonings of this kind in a contented spirit, submitting to the disposal of God.” (Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 29). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition).

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