

HOW CHRIST TEACHES CONTENTMENT

Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 86). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.

“They say, 'You must be content', and so on. But Paul needed to learn it, and it is a great art and mystery of godliness to be content in a Christian way, and it will be seen to be even more of a mystery when we come to show what lessons a gracious heart learns when it learns to be contented.”¹

“Now the lessons that Christ teaches to bring us to contentment are these:

1. THE LESSON OF SELF-DENIAL.

“It is a hard lesson.”²

- a) **Such a person learns to know that he is nothing.** He comes to this, to be able to say, 'Well, I see I am nothing in myself.'³

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)

⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6 (ESV)

⁵³ So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. John 6:53 (ESV)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

- b) **I deserve nothing.** I am nothing, and I deserve nothing.⁴

¹⁰ So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’” Luke 17:10 (ESV)

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:9–14 (ESV)

¹ At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18:1–4 (ESV)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

- c) **I can do nothing.** Christ says, 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5).⁵

²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” Matthew 13:23 (ESV)

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9–11 (ESV)

²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. 1 John 3:24 (ESV)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

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⁵ Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 88). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.

d) I am so vile that I cannot of myself receive any good.⁶

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” Mark 7:21–23 (ESV)

⁶ We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. Isaiah 64:6 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Romans 3:10–12 (ESV)

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Ephesians 2:1–3 (ESV)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

e) If God cleanses us in some measure, and puts into us some good liquor, some grace of his Spirit, yet we can make use of nothing when we have it, if God but withdraws himself.⁷

⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:1–8 (ESV)

²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. Romans 11:20–22 (ESV)

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)

¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 1 Corinthians 15:10 (ESV)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

f) We are worse than nothing. By sin we become a great deal worse than nothing.⁸

⁵ The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. Genesis 6:5 (ESV)

⁹ Who can say, “I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin”? Proverbs 20:9 (ESV)

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. John 8:34 (ESV)

²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? Matthew 16:26 (ESV)

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. Romans 3:21–25 (ESV)

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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.

⁶ Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 88). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition

⁷ Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 89). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.

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- g) **If we perish we will be no loss.** If God should annihilate me, what loss would it be to anyone? God can raise up someone else in my place to serve him in a different way.

Now put just these seven things together and then Christ has taught you self-denial. I may call these the several words in our lesson of self-denial.⁹

“Christ teaches the soul this, so that, as in the presence of God on a real sight of itself, it can say: 'Lord, I am nothing, Lord, I deserve nothing, Lord, I can do nothing, I can receive nothing, and can make use of nothing, I am worse than nothing, and if I come to nothing and perish I will be no loss at all and therefore is it such a great thing for me to be cut short here?' A man who is little in his own eyes will account every affliction as little, and every mercy as great. Consider Saul: There was a time, the Scripture says, when he was little in his own eyes, and then his afflictions were but little to him: when some would not have had him to be King but spoke contemptuously of him, he held his peace; but when Saul began to be big in his own eyes, then the affliction began to be great to him.

“There was never any man or woman so contented as a self-denying man or woman. No-one ever denied himself as much as Jesus Christ did: he gave his cheeks to the smiters, he opened not his mouth, he was as a lamb when he was led to the slaughter, he made no noise in the street. He denied himself above all, and was willing to empty himself, and so he was the most contented that ever any was in the world; and the nearer we come to learning to deny ourselves as Christ did, the more contented shall we be, and by knowing much of our own vileness we shall learn to justify God.

“Whatever the Lord shall lay upon us, yet he is righteous for he has to deal with a most wretched creature. A discontented heart is troubled because he has no more comfort, but a self-denying man rather wonders that he has as much as he has. Oh, says the one, I have but a little; Aye, says the man who has learned this lesson of self-denial, but I rather wonder that God bestows upon me the liberty of breathing in the air, knowing how vile I am, and knowing how much sin the Lord sees in me. And that is the way of contentment, by learning self-denial.¹⁰

⁹ Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 89). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.

¹⁰ Jeremiah Burroughs. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment (p. 89-90). Monergism Books. Kindle Edition.