

Contentment, Prosperity,  
and God's Glory



### **SERIES EDITORS**

Joel R. Beeke & Jay T. Collier

Interest in the Puritans continues to grow, but many people find the reading of these giants of the faith a bit unnerving. This series seeks to overcome that barrier by presenting Puritan books that are convenient in size and unintimidating in length. Each book is carefully edited with modern readers in mind, smoothing out difficult language of a bygone era while retaining the meaning of the original authors. Books for the series are thoughtfully selected to provide some of the best counsel on important subjects that people continue to wrestle with today.

# Contentment, Prosperity, and God's Glory

Jeremiah Burroughs

Edited by  
Phillip L. Simpson



**Reformation Heritage Books**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Contentment, Prosperity, and God's Glory*  
© 2013 by Reformation Heritage Books

Published by

**Reformation Heritage Books**

2965 Leonard St. NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889 / Fax: 616-285-3246

e-mail: [orders@heritagebooks.org](mailto:orders@heritagebooks.org)

website: [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org)

*Printed in the United States of America*

13 14 15 16 17 18/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Originally published as "The Art of Improving a Full and Prosperous Condition, for the Glory of God," in *Four Useful Discourses* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1675).

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Burroughs, Jeremiah, 1599-1646.

[Art of Improving a Full and Prosperous Condition, for the Glory of God]

Contentment, prosperity, and God's glory / Jeremiah Burroughs ; Edited by Phillip L. Simpson.

pages cm. — (Puritan treasures for today)

"Originally published as "The Art of Improving a Full and Prosperous Condition, for the Glory of God," in *Four Useful Discourses* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1675)."

ISBN 978-1-60178-232-8 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Contentment—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Simpson, Phillip L. II. Title.

BV4647.C7 B78 2013

248.4'859—dc23

2013009276

---

*For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above address.*

## *Table of Contents*

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Preface.....  | vii |
| 1. Introduction .....                                       | 1   |
| 2. What Learning to Be Full Means.....                      | 13  |
| 3. The Difficulty of Learning to Be Full.....               | 36  |
| 4. The Necessity of Learning to Be Full.....                | 53  |
| 5. The Excellency of Learning to Be Full.....               | 66  |
| 6. The Mystery of Learning to Be Full.....                  | 75  |
| 7. Lessons for Learning to Be Full.....                     | 93  |
| 8. Increasing the Guilt of Sins of Abundance.....           | 102 |
| 9. Applications for Improving<br>Prosperous Conditions..... | 106 |
| 10. Concluding Words on Contentment.....                    | 115 |



## Preface

Most of us would not consider ourselves wealthy. We compare our lifestyles to those of celebrities or famous CEOs, and the conclusion seems obvious: most of us are not rich, not poor, but right in the middle. We live average lives, earn an average income, and live within modest means in our average-size homes.

However, the words of the Puritan preacher Jeremiah Burroughs still hold true today: “We live here in such a way that, although we may not be as full now as we have been in the past, it may still be said of us that we are full in comparison to our brothers in other parts of the world.”<sup>1</sup> Comparatively speaking, most of us really are wealthy to some degree. We live in comfortably heated and air-conditioned homes. We are amply supplied with well-made clothes. Most of us did not have to scrimp and save to purchase this book, but bought it

---

1. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Four Useful Discourses* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1675), 2.

when we first felt the impulse to do so. We may not like to admit it, but we are wealthy.

We might also wrongly assume that our wealth will never tempt us to be discontent. After all, why should we be discontent when we are well-supplied with nearly everything we want? However, it was the apostle Paul who said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:11–12). In other words, contentment is a lesson to be learned not only in times of hunger and want but also in times of fullness and abundance.

Burroughs, like Paul, experienced both times of need and times of abundance. He insightfully observed that the lesson of finding contentment in a prosperous condition was more difficult than learning contentment while in need. "You think it's hard for poor people to know how to be in want," he once said, "but the truth is, it's rather the harder of the two to know how to be full."<sup>2</sup> Because he personally labored to find contentment through such circumstances, it will be worth our time to give attention to Burroughs's insights on this matter.

Burroughs was born in East Anglia, England, in 1599.<sup>3</sup> After completing his master of arts at

---

2. Burroughs, *Four Useful Discourses*, 5.

3. The biographical information from this preface is condensed from *A Life of Gospel Peace: The Biography of Jeremiah*



Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1625, he was forced to leave Cambridge because he refused to conform to the unbiblical rituals, ceremonies, and superstitions the Church of England had begun to impose. However, this did not prevent him from entering the ministry. After serving two years as an assistant minister (curate) at All Saints Church, Stisted, he was appointed lecturer at Bury St. Edmunds in 1627. Lecturers were allowed to preach in churches where no suitable gospel preaching was available. Since lecturers were not formally licensed as ministers (vicars) of the Church of England, they were free from the restrictions placed on vicars. Burroughs served as lecturer in the same town as Edmund Calamy (1600–1666) and even shared a town lectureship with him. Burroughs's future certainly seemed bright. His heart's desire was to serve the Lord and His kingdom in as great a capacity as He would allow.

However, his lectureship at Bury St. Edmunds did not turn out as he had hoped. In 1630 he reported, "I have been nearly three and a half years with them with little success."<sup>4</sup> To make matters worse, the congregation seemed determined to get rid of him because he spoke

---

*Burroughs*, by Phillip Simpson (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

4. Jeremiah Burroughs to John Cotton, in *The Correspondence of John Cotton*, transcribed by Sargent Bush, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 152–56.

out against a public sin committed by a local official. When the town voted to leave his pay at the discretion of his co-lecturer Henry White, he was left without any certainty of income. He was therefore forced to leave Bury St. Edmunds, taking a job offered to him at St. Margaret's in Tivetshall, Norfolk. This was somewhat disappointing to him; St. Margaret's was a small country church, and he felt that his ministry might be less effective than at the larger town of Bury.

Nevertheless, in 1631 he became the vicar of Tivetshall and served faithfully there for several years. He was even able to engage in rotating lectureships with William Bridge (1600–1671) and William Greenhill (1591–1671). However, when William Laud (1573–1645) was appointed archbishop, all ministers in England were required to read *The King's Book of Sports* from their pulpits. The *Book of Sports* was an official declaration of recreational activities in which the king's subjects were required to participate each Sunday. Such sports included "leaping, vaulting... May-games, Whitsun-ales, and Morris-dances, and the setting up of May-poles." For Burroughs and other Puritan ministers, this requirement violated their convictions regarding the sanctity of the Sabbath. Laud then appointed Bishop Matthew Wren (1585–1667) to visit the churches in Norfolk and report any non-conformists to him. Wren was especially zealous and enforced his own recently published "visitation articles,"

which contained 139 articles with 897 questions to be asked of ministers at these visitations. These included the following:

- ✦ Does he receive the sacrament kneeling himself, and administer to none but such as kneel?
- ✦ Does he wear the surplice while he is reading prayers and administering the sacrament?
- ✦ Does he in Rogation-days use the perambulation around the parish?
- ✦ Has your minister read the *Book of Sports* in his church or chapel?
- ✦ Does he use conceived (rather than written) prayers before or after the sermon?
- ✦ Are the graves dug east and west, and the bodies buried with their heads at the west?
- ✦ Do they kneel at confession, stand up at the creed, and bow at the glorious name of Jesus?<sup>5</sup>

Burroughs could not in good conscience conform to such superstitions. His personal conviction was as follows: “In God’s worship, there must be nothing tendered up to God but what He has commanded. Whatsoever

---

5. Abridged from *The History of the Puritans*, by Daniel Neal (London: William Baynes and Son, 1822), 2:247–48.

we meddle with in the worship of God must be what we have a warrant for out of the Word of God.”<sup>6</sup>

When Wren's chancellor showed up at Tivetshall, Burroughs refused to conform and was subsequently suspended from the ministry in 1636. In 1637, his license was revoked, leaving him not only without a ministry but also without income. Fortunately, the Earl of Warwick provided shelter for Burroughs, as he had for many other Puritan ministers who had been similarly removed from public ministry. Earlier, Burroughs had expressed his hope of serving the Lord in a way that would allow him to do much good for His kingdom. Instead, his only preaching opportunities became those sermons preached before the Earl of Warwick's family and friends in the Earl's home.

To make matters worse, another minister accused Burroughs of justifying the Scots in their taking up arms against the king. Though the minister later recanted, officials continued with proceedings to arrest Burroughs. In late 1638, he fled England. Boarding a ship bound for Rotterdam, Holland, he accepted William Bridge's call to assist him as teacher there. This was an especially difficult time for Burroughs; he left behind many friends and earthly goods. Further, he was a patriot who loved England. “We scarcely thought we

---

6. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship* (Orlando: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990), 10.

should ever have seen our country again," he said.<sup>7</sup> However, his sermons during this time never express a hint of complaint.

Burroughs's perseverance during this downward spiral of narrowing influence and ministry opportunities is exemplary. One reason for this was his view of contentment. Burroughs matched his own definition of contentment, possessing that "sweet, inward, quiet gracious frame of spirit" that freely submitted to and delighted in "God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."<sup>8</sup> For Burroughs, a Christian could find contentment in any circumstance if Christ Himself was his cherished possession. He said, "A Christian should be satisfied with what God has made the object of his faith (i.e., Christ). The object of his faith is high enough to satisfy his soul, were it capable of a thousand times more than it is. Now if you may have the object of your faith you have enough to content your soul."<sup>9</sup> While he was in Holland, Burroughs told his congregation that it was important to possess a "contentment of spirit that should be present in leaving all

---

7. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Sion's Joy. A Sermon Preached to the Honorable House of Commons Assembled in Parliament, at Their Publique Thanksgiving, September 7, 1641, for the Peace Concluded between England and Scotland* (London: T. P. and M. S., 1641), 41.

8. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 19.

9. Burroughs, *Rare Jewel*, 150.

for the cause of God."<sup>10</sup> By God's grace, he was able to do just that.

His contentment during these extenuating circumstances paid off, for in 1641 the new Parliament allowed all ejected ministers, including Burroughs, to return to England. Almost immediately he was appointed as lecturer to three large churches; two of these, Stepney and Cripplegate, were accounted to be England's largest congregations.

While he was at Stepney, Burroughs preached a sermon series that would later become one of his most well-received books: *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. This series of sermons was preached from Philippians 4:11–12: "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

However, most modern readers of Burroughs are unaware that he followed this series on contentment in times of need with three sermons on achieving contentment during times of abundance. These sermons were compiled as an appendix to *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* and were later published in the book *Four Useful Discourses*. This appendix was titled "The Art

---

10. Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Excellency of Holy Courage in Evil Times* (London: Peter Cole and Edward Cole, 1662), 65.

of Improving a Full and Prosperous Condition for the Glory of God.” This lesson was especially needed for the congregation at Stepney, among which were many wealthy merchants and others of elevated social stature.

However, this lesson was not helpful for Burroughs’s congregation only; Burroughs applied it to his own heart as well. His appointment to these large, wealthy congregations led to a new trial, one he called “the burden that is in a prosperous condition.”<sup>11</sup> Being well paid for these lectureships (though he never sought a large salary), he was forced to find contentment in his newfound prosperity.

On the surface, this may seem like an easy venture; it almost seems unnecessary to instruct someone to be content in times of prosperity. However, Burroughs knew that he needed to learn to view this situation biblically. The truth is that times of prosperity and abundance can provide some of the strongest temptations to pull our hearts away from God. Those with wealth are often concerned with gaining even more, rather than living contentedly, as if their wealth contributed nothing to their happiness. It is often difficult for someone in a prosperous condition to truly live as if Christ is enough.

From all accounts, Burroughs seems to have won this inward fight for contentment in prosperity. He said of this struggle, “Through God’s mercy, though I

---

11. Burroughs, *Rare Jewel*, 103.

have many weaknesses, and I fail in all that I do, yet I can say, to the praise of God, that my estate has not estranged my heart from God; rather, my heart cleaves to God, and I have communion with God in the things that God sends me."<sup>12</sup> His closest friends, including William Bridge, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), and William Greenhill, agreed. They noted how Burroughs labored to gain insight into biblical contentment and observed that he “has hewn forth this ‘jewel’...out of the Rock, and has artificially cut it, that the innate rays of this, so glorious a grace, might shine forth to others.”<sup>13</sup> Impressed with how his life reinforced his teaching on contentment, his friends remarked in their introduction to *A Treatise of Earthly-Mindedness*, “So, now, reader, you have these sermons twice printed: once in the practice of this holy man and once again in these papers which we present to you.”<sup>14</sup>

Besides achieving popularity as a preacher, Burroughs was also given the honor of serving in the Westminster Assembly of Divines. He worked on the catechism and confession of faith and attempted—unsuccessfully—

---

12. Burroughs, *Four Useful Discourses*, 47.

13. Thomas Goodwin et al., “To the Reader,” in *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, by Jeremiah Burroughs (London: W. Bentley, 1651), n.p.

14. Thomas Goodwin et al., “To the Reader,” in *A Treatise of Earthly-Mindedness*, by Jeremiah Burroughs (Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998), iii.



to obtain toleration for those convinced of a congregational form of church government. In addition, he was given the honor of preaching before Parliament on several occasions.

Burroughs was not without further trials during this phase of his life. He likely did not marry until he was in his early forties; the couple remained childless. One of his most difficult trials took place when he became the target of vitriolic attacks by men like Thomas Edwards (1599–1647) and John Vicars (1582–1652), who sought to undermine Burroughs's ministry by writing slanderous treatises against him. These attacks burdened Burroughs's spirit so much that his health suffered. Despite all this, his character remained so exemplary that his fellow Puritan ministers marveled at his ability to maintain a peaceable, godly spirit.

Burroughs died in 1646 following a fall from a horse. He had become so beloved in London during these years that, following his death, it was reported that he was "a man much lamented."

The book you now hold contains Burroughs's original appendix to *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. It is presented here to the modern reader with editorial changes to improve readability. In addition, Burroughs preached a sermon to Parliament on the same subject.<sup>15</sup>

---

15. Jeremiah Burroughs, *A Sermon Preached before the Right Honorable House of Peers, in the Abbey at Westminster, the 26th of*

Although Burroughs used the same text (Philippians 4:12), and many of the points overlapped, he included new material not found in the sermons he preached at Stepney. Therefore, some of the material from his parliamentary sermon has also been assimilated into this present volume, since many of these points and illustrations are helpful and applicable to the modern reader.

It is my prayer that Burroughs's words will grip your hearts, as they have continued to grip mine. Like Paul, and like Burroughs, we need to learn contentment in prosperity as well as in need. May we use all that we have been given in such a way as to bring our God the greatest glory.

Phillip L. Simpson

## CHAPTER 1

# *Introduction*

*I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

—Philippians 4:12

It is a common saying that there are many people who are neither well when they are full nor when they are fasting. If they are in affliction, then they are obstinate and discontented. If they are in a state of prosperity, they are unruly. Just like children, they cry and are obstinate if you do not let them have what they want, but if you do let them have what they want, then they are unruly. They cannot behave orderly either way. There are some people who are of such irritable and unpleasant dispositions that no matter what condition they are put into, they are obnoxious. There are some who have unpleasant hearts, and they are unpleasant in every circumstance they encounter. But Paul, by the work of the

grace of God, was fitted for all circumstances—not only for affliction, but if God willed that he be prosperous, then he could tell how to make use of that. “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need” (Phil. 4:12). But what were the specific circumstances that led Paul to make these statements?

### **Context of the Passage**

Besides the apostolic call Paul had to preach to all nations, he had a special, extraordinary call to preach to these Philippians: “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9). Philippi was the first place in Macedonia where he preached; it was a chief city in that part of Macedonia (16:12). But was Paul encouraged by the fruit of this extraordinary call? One would have thought that the people would have immediately come to embrace the gospel, that the hearts of the people would have been mightily stirred. But Paul’s preaching was, at first, not so successful. The first Sabbath that he went there, he went to a riverside to preach.

Did the nobles, the magistrates, the gentry, or the chief citizens come out to hear him? No, only a few women came out to hear him, for verse 13 says, “We sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted

thither." Did the Word of God have any effect on any of the women? Yes, for it says that "a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened" (16:14). Though he had no better success at first, it was possible that his preaching might prove more successful afterward.

The next thing we hear of Paul is that he, along with Silas, was dragged rudely before the magistrates by the multitude, accused of troubling the city. The magistrates viewed Paul and Silas as vile men, guilty of horrible things, and became enraged against them. They tore their clothes and whipped them; they put them into prison, where they were thrust into the dungeon and put into stocks. Was this the fruit of Paul's wonderful call of God, his vision from heaven? And was it such fruit as this that encouraged a man of such a mighty apostolic spirit as Paul to come to Philippi to preach?

Oh, what sad and discouraging circumstances some men encounter in the work that God has called them to! Learn by this never to conclude that a work is not of God just because you encounter discouraging circumstances at first. Pour your hearts out to God and rest in His call; good fruit will come about in the end.

The spirits of Paul and Silas were not disheartened by this lack of success, for in 1 Thessalonians 2:2 Paul tells us that "even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi,

we were bold in our God." There was finally a church in Philippi that was as free from contamination and as eminent in godliness as any. Though men may scheme, condemn, and cast dirt upon a certain movement—even stirring up the authorities and the people against it—still, it may prevail at last.

In Philippians 1:3–4, Paul says, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy." Though these Philippians were moved at first, did the work of the gospel on their hearts endure? Many seem to be effectively changed by the gospel when they first hear it, and their situation looks hopeful, but after a while this all vanishes and comes to nothing. But this was not the case with the Philippians, for in verse 5 he says that their fellowship in the gospel had continued "from the first day until now," which had been about ten years. Many churches, when they first gather, have sweet fellowship, but in less than five years it is interrupted by divisions, and its former glory becomes darkened.

At this time Paul was in prison at Rome. The Philippians, who had heard the gospel through Paul's ministry, sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul when they heard of his imprisonment. They also sent gifts by Epaphroditus to give relief to Paul and to provide for his necessities. It is worth noting that Paul's sufferings did not cause them to lose their affection for Paul or his doctrine. If someone wants to prevail against the people

of God, against Christian truths, or against the ways of God, they should not use violence against them to do so; hypocrites may be prevailed against that way, but those who are sound in the faith will be strengthened even more solidly by such means.

Now, when the Philippians sent supplies to relieve Paul in prison, he took the occasion to write this epistle to them. In the epistle he rejoices at their care for him. However, he was aware that someone might have accused him of merely loving them in order to receive gifts from them; indeed, such gifts can often become snares to ministers of the gospel. Therefore he responds by saying, "No, it is not because I am lacking anything that I am writing this epistle to you. I am not bothered by being in need, so don't think that I desire to profit from my imprisonment. 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.' Let me be in need or not; it makes no real difference to me, for 'I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound...in all things I am instructed.'"

Notice how Paul says, "I know." Humility is a *knowing* grace. By this, Paul does not mean he knows how to abase and abuse himself; that would be foolish. Neither is he saying that he knows how to suffer, because when God calls him to suffer he will suffer; that would be silliness. Rather, when Paul says, "I know...how to be abased," he means that he has learned to *submit* to suffering in a humble manner. Humility can be borne of

fear or of ignorance or of lack of skill, but the humility of which Paul speaks here is a knowing humility.

Also, when Paul says, "I know," he means "I *have* known it; I have been acquainted with this. I am not about to begin learning it now. When God first called me, He showed me what things I must suffer for His name; it is not a lesson to learn now. I know how to be abased, for I have learned it in Christ's school; I have even learned how to be trampled under the feet of others." A godly heart is willing to lie under the feet of anyone for the sake of good.

Finally, when Paul says, "I know how," he means that he knows how to rightly judge his abasement. He knows not to look at it as a repulsive thing, as carnal hearts would, but to see honor in his abasement. If I know how to be abased, then that means I know how to interpret God's intention for my abasement differently than the world does. I know how to bear it with a quiet spirit; I know how to satisfy my heart in the midst of it. I know how to improve my abasement for the glory of God and for the spiritual good of my own soul, as well as that of others. I know how to exercise faith and other graces in the midst of it. I know how to get the sting out of it; I know how to remove the venom from it. I know how to carry myself in a gracious, comfortable, and heavenly manner in the midst of my abasement. Although the world may put dishonor upon me, I shall not dishonor myself or my cause by any unseemly behavior. It appears



that Paul did indeed know how to do this, for his gracious character while he was chained in bonds actually helped to further the conversion of many, including some from Caesar's court (see Phil. 4:22).

### **Introduction to the Topic**

In another book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, I discussed the doctrine of the Christian's contentment in any circumstance. In the closing portion of that book I propounded several considerations for Christian contentment. I then gave several directions regarding what we are to do in order to exercise the grace of Christian contentment.

Among all others, there is one special thing that I commended and would still point out, and that is that you make a good interpretation of God's mercies and dealings toward you. Have good thoughts of God and make good interpretations of His dealings toward you. It is very hard to live comfortably and cheerfully among friends when one makes harsh interpretations of the words and actions of another. The only way to keep sweet contentment and comfort in Christian societies is to make the best interpretations of things we can. Likewise, a primary way to help to keep comfort and contentment in our hearts is to make good interpretations of God's dealings with us.

I will leave it to God to bless those lessons that have already been delivered to you, and I hope that when any

temptation arises for discontentment, some of the truths you have received may come to mind. I also hope that when some of you see others discontented (such as a wife with her husband, a husband with his wife, or one brother or friend to another), you may be able to use something from this text to counsel them regarding this grace of contentment. Although I spent a long time teaching this lesson, yet it is a longer lesson to learn than it is to teach. You will need a longer time to learn it than I have spent teaching it. We will not learn it in a few weeks; we will need to spend years learning this great lesson.

Now we come to another lesson that is just as hard to learn: namely, how to be full. "I am instructed," says Paul, "how to be content in all states; I am instructed how to be full. If God sends in supplies to me, if He gives me respect and honor among the churches, I know who to look up to as the cause of it all. I know how to carry myself in a holy and spiritual manner in the midst of all these enjoyments. If God gives me so much that it runs over, I know how to make good use of it."

Now this is a hard lesson, but because these are times in which people generally suffer and don't have as great abundance as they formerly enjoyed, I had intended not to expand upon this argument as much as I had upon the other. That seemed to be more suitable. However, the truth is that we live here in such a way that, although we may not be as full now as we have been in the past, it may still be said of us that we are

full in comparison to our brothers in other parts of the world. Besides, perhaps God will hasten our fullness if we are taught how to be full before fullness comes. I will now open up this lesson—"I am instructed how to be full," says the apostle—any conditions, either full or empty, either way.

There is a parallel passage to this in 2 Corinthians 6:8. Paul describes the different conditions that he went through "by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report." Sometimes the apostles had honor, sometimes they had dishonor; sometimes people spoke well of them, and sometimes they spoke ill of them. "Yet," he says, "we went through it all; we carried on the work of the gospel in all things." So, in verse 10 he says, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich." "Whatever our condition was," he says, "yet through the grace of God we were carried through it all, and we did so in a manner so as to sanctify God's name and to further the gospel in it." Many men are prepared for one condition, but they are not prepared for another. This, by contrast, was the excellence of the grace of God in the apostle: he was prepared for any condition that God might turn him toward.

### **The Doctrine Presented**

Now then, regarding this lesson of being full, this is our primary point:

*A Christian is taught by God to know how to be full.*

The Christian learns this lesson. There are many who would gladly hear a lesson on how they could obtain fullness, but they do not consider it as necessary to learn how to sanctify God's name in their fullness. If I could preach a sermon or two to you on how you could supply your wants and how to obtain wealth, I have no question that our church would be filled with people. This would be the case if we were to teach poor people how they could get rich, to teach those who are disgraced how they could get honor, to teach men how they could have good and prosperous journeys, and the like. But I am teaching you a lesson from God rather than man at this time, and that is much better. It is a better lesson for one to learn how to honor God in fullness than it is to learn how he can get full.

It is a good sign that truth and grace are working in your heart if you judge this to be the better thing. That is, it's better to know how to honor God with those good things I have than to know how I can get more. It's better to know how I might behave myself in the enjoyment of those good things God has given me than to know how to get more of those good things. God has given me a reasonably large estate, in that my house has fullness in it, and I have everything I need. It may be you do not have as many fine things as others have, but what do many of you lack in your houses? You have all kinds of household items that are necessary for you and a convenient diet that is also necessary for you. You are

therefore full because you have all things that are necessary, even though you may not have everything on which you have set your eye.

We used to say that it's better to fill a child's belly than his eye. Perhaps your every whim is not supplied, but your necessity is supplied. When the necessity of a person is supplied, his condition is said to be full. Therefore, let not those who are in a poorer condition than others think this lesson does not concern them. While it is true that you do not have as much as others have, you do have enough to keep you in health and strength, fit for God's service. Besides, I am sure that you all abound more than Paul, and yet he said, "I have all, and abound, and am full." Oh, that you would apply your hearts to learn how to abound in what you have. It's a good sign of grace to be more concerned about how to abound than how to get abundance—to be more careful to use what you have for God than to maintain it for yourselves.

Therefore, since this argument is of great necessity and use (as I hope shall be obvious before I am done), I shall unfold this lesson, dividing it into the following headings:

- ✦ When may a man be said to have learned how to be full? "I am instructed," says Paul, "and know how to be full."
- ✦ How difficult it is for us to learn how to be full

## 12      **Contentment, Prosperity, and God's Glory**

- ✦ What a great need there is for us to learn how to be full
- ✦ What an excellent thing it is for a man to know how to be full
- ✦ What mystery of godliness is found in knowing how to be full
- ✦ What the several lessons are that Christ teaches the soul in order to learn how to be full
- ✦ What conditions aggravate the contemptibility and guilt of sins related to abundance
- ✦ The application of it all