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Teaching Notes

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Christian Contentment BFL 2018: Week 8

The Evils and Excuses of a Murmuring Heart

A. Paul

Philippians 4:11-13 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who strengthens me.

B. Jeremiah Burroughs

Definition: Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.

Last week: The Excellence of Christian Contentment

- I. The Excellence of Christian Contentment
 - A. By contentment we give God his due worship
 - B. In contentment is much exercise of grace
 - C. By contentment the soul is fitted to receive mercy
 - D. Contentment fits us to do service
 - E. Contentment delivers from temptation
 - F. Contentment draw comfort from things not possessed
 - G. A contented man may expect reward
 - H. By contentment the soul come nearest the excellence of God

Now... The Evils and Excuses of a Murmuring Spirit

Goal: Attraction and repulsion!! Like a magnet!

Thomas Chalmers preached a sermon entitled “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” In it, he argued that there are two opposite ways to get someone to behave morally: 1) by showing how evil and corrupt is the sin, and by creating a revulsion from it so that the person draws back from that wicked pattern of life; 2) by showing how delightful and beautiful is God and his holy ways so that, by attraction the person yearns to live that kind of a life.

Jeremiah Burroughs wanted his readers to be honest about how often they have yielded to this sin of murmuring and rebelling against God in the past. He wanted them to see how many tiny irritations in life have caused them to mumble complaints; how many larger afflictions have led them into deep and foul accusations against the goodness of God; how consistently negative and bitter they have been toward the trials God has chosen to bring to them; how anxious they have been about further such trials. As Burroughs said, “There is more evil (in your hearts and habits) than you are aware of.”

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Ps. 139:23-24)

The idea of such a prayer is not that God would discover something new about us, for God has already searched us and known us (vs. 1) Instead, that God would reveal to us our own corruptions.

Think of your normal daily habits. What are you like if you discover you are out of coffee? If you get in your car and it doesn’t start or there is something wrong with the engine? If you get a bill you didn’t expect? If another driver gives you a rude or angry gesture? If you have chronic irritation with an itchy rash that defies the medication the dermatologist prescribed? If your boss never seems to notice the good work you do, or you get passed over for a promotion in your department and it goes to someone you consider inferior to you? How much worse are your thoughts and words should any severe trial come into your life? The death of a dear family member? The loss of your home to a natural disaster?

Do you have any conception of how many complaints you’ve uttered in the last year? What would your spouse or your kids or parents say about you, if they had to tell the truth? Do your friends and family members see you are characterized by consistent Christian contentment? Or does God have to do a significant work in your heart and in your habits to cause you to forsake complaining and murmuring against God in both small and large trials?

Complaining has been around from the beginning of man's sinful history

I. Introduction

God greatly judged Israel for murmuring and complaining against him:

Numbers 21:4-9 They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; ⁵ they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!" ⁶ Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. ⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." ⁸ The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." ⁹ So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.

II. The Evils and Excuses of a Murmuring Spirit

My comments: Difficulties in Cameroon... yet, I think this is worthwhile to walk through!! Also, if we were created to give God PRAISE and THANKSGIVING, do you not see how COMPLAINING is the OPPOSITE of that??

A. It is the OPPOSITE of praise and worship!!

1. We were created to praise God and give him glory...
2. Even more poignantly, we were REDEEMED to declare God's praises

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

3. When we complain, we are doing the exact opposite!!

B. It reveals much corruption in the soul

1. As contentment displays much grace in the soul, strong grace, beautiful grace, so murmuring argues much corruption, strong corruption, vile corruptions in your heart.

2. If a man is so sick that every little scratch of a pin makes his flesh rankle no matter where it is on the body, you will say the man's health is very bad. In the same way, if a man complains over the smallest provocations, if every little trouble makes him discontented, his spirit is seriously sick.

3. HOW COULD LITTLE PROVOCATIONS CAUSE SUCH COMPLAINING???

Burroughs: "O that we could but convince men and women that a murmuring spirit is a greater evil than any affliction, whatever the affliction!"

C. It is the mark of an ungodly generation

1. Failure to give thanks to God is part of his diagnosis of unregeneration humanity

"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Rom. 1:21)

2. In Jude 16, "murmuring" is the first mark of the ungodly that the Lord will return with thousands of angels to destroy

Jude 1:14-16 "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." ¹⁶ These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires

3. So this vice of murmuring, which is contrary to contentment, is not as small an issue as you might think

Burroughs: "You think you are not as ungodly as others, because you do not swear and drink as others do, but you may be ungodly in murmuring."

4. God is as eager to convict this sin as any that are enslaved to drunkenness, or to whoredom.

D. Murmuring is accounted rebellion

1. We are commanded to worship God, and essential to that is the posture of crouching down under his hand as a dog to his master
2. But murmuring is rebellion... when we will not submit to what God has chosen for us

3. Key biblical account: Numbers 16:41 in which the whole assembly of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron; and in Number 17:10 God calls them “rebels”. Someone who is murmuring is rebelling against God
4. When discontent comes, it grows into murmuring, then into open rebellion
5. Massah and Meribah are symbols of an unregenerate generation that did not enter the Promised Land

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways.” Therefore I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.” (Ps. 95:7-11)

Hebrews 3:16-19 Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? ¹⁸ And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹ So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

E. It is contrary to grace, especially in conversion

In salvation, God works in you to 1) see your sin; 2) see the greatness of Christ; 3) turn ultimately away from all creature-comforts in this world; 4) cast your soul fully on Christ as the fountain of all good; 5) subdue your soul to God, so that Christ the King rules in your heart; 6) turning you to give yourself up in an everlasting covenant to belong to God

1. Q: What is the work of God when he brings a sinner home to himself? A: God makes the soul sensible of the dreadful evil that is sin, and the great breach the sin has made between God and the soul

Murmuring is OPPOSITE TO each of these, indeed is INSANE compared to them all

2. See your SIN:

- a. Now see how evil murmuring is: God has shown you the great evil of your soul in sin, and you are troubled for every little affliction!

- b. If I really saw how evil sin is, it would swallow up all other concerns

- c. How could I murmur about some small affliction, when God has made me see myself as a damned wretch and made me wonder why I have not already been cast into hell?! [141]

3. See the greatness of Christ:

- a. Murmuring is also cast against the sight of the infinite worth and excellence of Jesus Christ, and the glory of the gospel... God has revealed the glory and beauty and excellence of Christ to my soul; what is this mild affliction or difficulty compared to that?
- [AD] Imagine taking a person to the Grand Canyon and as you approach the breathtaking rim and see all the colors and the awesome display of immensity, the person is angry and frustrated at the fact that their hand-held computer game has run out of battery power, or that they are losing at the game. Given the expense of paying for their plane flight and all the joy you have in revealing this beauty, for them to be angry about something that petty is irksome to the max. You might want to grab the game and chuck it as far as you could into the Canyon!

The glories of Christ's person on the cross and in his resurrection are infinite... the Holy Spirit has given you some of that vision; how could anything be equal to that?

4. Turn the soul from all creature comforts in this world

- a. The soul used to be seeking comfort in this world's things
- b. God called the soul away from that to seeking comfort in heavenly things
- c. Murmuring is a bitter retreat to the land from which you were rescued
- d. When you are content in the face of earthly adversity, it is a clear way of saying that you have been saved into a rich heavenly hope... your heart is not glued to the world. Murmuring says exactly the opposite

Illust: Picture a cluster of pipes of various diameters, all opening into a vat of happiness. And heavenly nectar of blessing is flowing through some of them at any given time, but not all of them. Some of the conduits are huge suppliers of nectar into the vat, others are smaller, some are not flowing at all at that moment, but may have been in the past. If we are enraged at the ones that are dry at this moment, we forget that all of them are gifts of God's grace, and God doesn't owe us any grace (nectar), but may choose to open some pipelines and close others. To rage that this or that pipeline is closed off is to forget that all of them come from God.

5. God works in the soul to cast itself fully on Christ as the Fountain of all its goodness, and all good things
 - a. If God has done this, and you are later deeply annoyed and discontented about some earthly thing, could not God say to you “It THIS your faith???!?”
6. In salvation, the soul is subdued to God, receiving Christ as KING to rule, order, and dispose of him as he pleases
 - a. A murmuring spirit is exactly the opposite of this... it chafes and fights against what Christ the King has ordained
7. In conversion, the soul has resigned itself in an everlasting covenant to belong to God as his treasured possession
 - a. A fretting, murmuring heart is strongly opposed to this
8. Our conversion is just begun when we first believed; we must continually be converted and see the labor on our souls which was first wrought to continue to the end
9. LOOK BACK at how it was at the beginning.

Burroughs: “If you could but obtain so much liberty of your own spirits as to look back to see what the work of God was in converting you, there is nothing would prevail more than to think of that. I am now in a murmuring, discontented way, but how did I feel my soul working when God turned my soul to himself! Oh, how opposite is this to that work, and how unbecoming! Oh, what shame and confusion would come upon the spirits of men and women, if they could but compare the work of corruption in their murmuring and discontent with the work of God that was upon their souls in conversion!” [143]

F. It is below a Christian

1. It is too base and lowly a condition of soul for a Christian! We should be disgusted to wallow in it!
2. It is below the relation of a Christian... for we call God our Father
 - a. Jonadab said to Amnon, “Aren’t you the king’s son? Why are you so haggard say after day?” (2 Sam. 13:4)
 - b. So we should say, “Why am I like this, given I am the king’s son?”

c. [AD] 1 Corinthians 3: All things are yours!!!

d. [AD] How dishonoring to the bounty of our Father the King to murmur about his choices and provisions, as though he were poor in resources or in love or in wisdom?

3. It is below our relationship to Christ... for we are married to him! He is our spouse, our protector, our head

a. Elkanah said to the distraught Hannah, “Am I not better than ten sons to you?” (1 Sam. 1:8)

b. Couldn't Christ say to us, “Am I not better to you than thousands of riches and comforts, such comforts that you are murmuring about now?”

[AD] Imagine the dishonor a husband would feel if he came to realize that his wife would prefer he were dead so she could have the life insurance policy. The money is better to her than having him. But if we murmur, we are saying to Christ, “I would rather have this worldly thing than you. Having you is not enough... for my happiness, I need more.”

i) If we know a newly married couple that seems unhappy after a short time, it seems they were deeply disappointed with each other because they are not as happy as they were originally

ii) But it must not be so between us and Christ!

G. By murmuring we undo our prayers

1. In prayer, you are acknowledging God's sovereign control over all things, and you are professing yourselves to be at God's disposal

2. When you are discontented and murmuring, you are undoing all your prayers

So whenever you murmur, ask yourself, “Is this according to my prayers by which I held God's kingly power over me?”

H. The evil effects of a discontented heart of murmuring

1. You waste a lot of time (meditating on complaining rather than on God's power)

2. It unfits you for duty (since you are so distracted by complaints)

3. It causes wickedness of heart to rise up and evil resolutions

4. It promotes unthankfulness (men and women cease giving thanks to God for his blessings)

Burroughs: Imagine if you were to give someone a small amount of money, and he were to say, “What is this you have given me? This is nothing!” you would be very offended because of his lack of thankfulness. But when we murmur, it’s like saying “All God’s gifts are worthless. They are of no good to me; they are only a few coins.”

Think of all the physical and spiritual gifts God has lavished on you; murmuring severs the flow of thankfulness for these things

God expects us to spend some time every day in thankfulness to him for his blessings

Burroughs: “A godly man wonders at his cross that it is not more, a wicked man wonders why his cross is so much”

ESPECIALLY: It drags other people DOWN!! It is discouraging to be around complaining people!

It sets a BAD EXAMPLE for other Christians (or your children); and it makes NO NON-CHRISTIAN want to be like you!

1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

III. The Excuses of a Murmuring Spirit

- A. “It’s not complaining; I’m just venting” (the “Therapeutic View” of complaining)
- B. “I’m really just genuinely troubled over my sin”
- C. “God has abandoned me.”
- D. “You don’t know my wife... or my boss... or my teenager... or my neighbor”
- E. “I never expected this”
- F. “You’ve never experienced anything like what I’m going through right now!”
- G. “I don’t deserve this.”
- H. “The wicked prosper, and that really angers me.”
- I. “Yes, I know I’m complaining, but I can’t help myself... I’m just weak!”

IV. Conclusion/Summary

Murmuring is beneath our Christian profession, for God never promised us that we would have no trouble or afflictions or crosses in the world! Not at all! But when we murmur, it's as though we felt God has broken a promise to us, or is treating us unjustly.