

THE ART OF DIVINE CONTENTMENT

**PART
FOUR**



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The Art of Divine Contentment — Part Four

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CHAPTER XII

Three things inserted by way of Caution.

In the next place, I come to lay down some necessary cautions. Though I say a man should be content in every estate, yet there are three estates in which he must not be contented.

1. **He must not be contented in a natural estate:** here we must learn not to be content. A sinner in his pure naturals is under the wrath of God, (John. 3:16) and shall he be content when that dreadful vial is going to be poured out? Is it nothing to be under the scorplings of divine fury? “who can dwell with everlasting burnings?” A sinner, as a sinner, is under the power of Satan, (Acts 26:18) and shall he in his estate be contented? Who would be contented to stay in the enemies’ quarters? While we sleep in the lap of sin, the devil doth to us as the Philistines did to Samson, cut out the lock of our strength, and put out our eyes. Be not content, O sinner, in this estate! For a man to be in debt, body and soul; in fear every hour to be arrested and carried prisoner to hell, shall he now be content? Here I preach against contentation. Oh get out of this condition! I would hasten you out of it as the angel hastened lot out of Sodom, (Gen. 19:15); there is the smell of the fire and brimstone upon you. The longer a man stays in his sin, the more sin doth strengthen. It is hard to get out of sin, when the heart as a garrison is victualled and fortified. A young plant is easily removed, but when the tree is once rooted, there is no stirring of it: thou who art rooted in thy pride, unbelief, impenitency, it will cost thee many a sad pull ere thou art plucked out of thy natural estate, (Jer. 6:16). It is an hard thing to have a brazen face and a broken heart; “he travaileth with iniquity,” (Psa. 7:14); be assured, the longer you travail with your sins, the more and the sharper pangs you must expect in the new birth. O be not contented with your natural estate! David saith, “why art thou cast down, O my soul?” (Psa. 43:5). But a sinner should say to himself, why art thou not disquieted, O my soul? Why is it that thou layest afflictions so to

heart, and canst not lay sin to heart? It is a mercy when we are disquieted about sin. A man had better be at the trouble of setting a bone, than to be lame, and in pain all his life; blessed is that trouble that brings the soul to Christ. It is one of the worst sights to see a bad conscience quiet; of the two, better is a fever than a lethargy. I wonder to see a man in his natural estate content. What! content to go to hell?

2. Though, in regard of externals, a man should be in every estate content, yet **he must not be content in such a condition wherein God is apparently dishonoured.** If a man's trade be such that he can hardly use it, but he must trespass upon a command, and so make a trade of sin, he must not content himself in such a condition; God never called any man to such a calling as is sinful; a man in this case, had better knock off and divert, better lose some of his gain, so he may lessen some of his guilt. So, for servants that live in a profane family, the suburbs of hell, where the name of God is not called upon, unless when it is taken in vain, they are not to content themselves in such a place, they are to come out of the tents of these sinners; there is a double danger in living among the profane.

(1). *Lest we come to be infected with the poison of their ill example.* Joseph, living in Pharaoh's court, had learned to swear "by the life of Pharaoh," (Gen. 42:15). We are prone to suck in example: men take in deeper impressions by the eye than the ear. Dives was a bad pattern, and he had many brethren that seeing him sin, trode just in his steps, therefore saith he, "I pray thee send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment," (Luke 16:27, 28). Dives knew which way they went; it is easy to catch a disease from another, but not to catch health. The bad will sooner corrupt the good, than the good will convert the bad. Take an equal quantity and proportion, so much sweet wine with so much sour vinegar; the vinegar will sooner sour the wine than the wine will sweeten the vinegar. Sin is compared to the plague, (1 Kings 8:37), and to leaven, (1 Cor. 5:7), to show of what a spreading nature it is. A bad master makes a bad servant. Jacob's cattle, by looking on the rods which were speckled and ring-straked conceived the rods.

We do as we see others do before us, especially those that are above us. If the head be sick, the other parts of the body are distempered. If the sun shines not upon the mountains, it must needs set in the valleys. We pray, “lead us not into temptation:” Lot was the world’s miracle, who kept himself fresh in Sodom’s salt water.

(2). By living in an evil family, *we are liable to incur their punishment*: “pour out thy wrath upon the families that call not upon thy name,” (Jer. 10:25). For want of pouring out of prayer, the wrath of God was ready to be poured out. It is dangerous living in the tents of Kedar. When God sends his flying roll, written within and without with curses, it enters into the house of the thief and the perjurer, “and consumes the timber and the stones thereof,” (Zech. 5:4). Is it not of sad consequence to live in a profane perjured family, when the sin of the governor pulls his house about his ears? If the stones and timber be destroyed, how shall the servant escape? And suppose God send not a temporal roll of curses in the family, there is a “spiritual roll, and that is worse,” (Prov. 3:33). Be not content to live where religion dies. “Salute the brethren, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house,” (Col. 4:15). The house of the godly is a little church, the house of the wicked a little hell, (Prov. 7:27). Oh, incorporate yourselves into a religious family; the house of a good man is perfumed with a blessing, (Prov. 3:33). When the holy oil of grace is poured on the head, the savour of this ointment sweetly diffuseth itself, and the virtue of it runs down upon the skirts of the family. Pious examples are very magnetical and forcible. Seneca said to his sister, though I leave you not wealth, yet I leave you a good example. Let us ingraft ourselves among the saints; by being often among the spices, we come to smell of them.

3. The third caution is, though in every condition we must be content, yet **we are not to content ourselves with a little grace**. Grace is the best blessing. Though we should be contented with a competency of estate, yet not with a competency of grace. It was the end of Christ’s ascension to heaven, to give gifts; and the end of those gifts, “that we may grow up into him in all things who is the head, even Christ, (Eph. 4:15). Where the apostle

distinguisheth between our being in Christ, and our growing in him; our ingratiating, and our flourishing; be not content with a modicum in religion.

It is not enough that there be life, but there must be fruit. Barrenness in the law was accounted a curse: the farther we are from the fruit, the nearer we are to cursing, (Heb. 6:8). It is a sad thing when men are fruitful only in the unfruitful works of darkness. Be not content with a drachm or two of grace; next to a still-born, a starveling in Christ is worse. O covet more grace! never think thou hast enough. We are bid to covet the best things, (1 Cor. 12:31). It is an heavenly ambition when we desire to be high in God's favour, a blessed contentation when all the strife is who shall be most holy. St Paul, though he was content with a little of the world, yet not with a little grace: "he reached forward, and pressed towards the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," (Phil. 3:13, 14). A true Christian is a wonder; he is the most contented, and yet the least satisfied; he is contented with a morsel of bread, and a little water in the cruise, yet never satisfied with grace; he doth pant and breath after more; this is his prayer, "Lord, more conformity to Christ, more communion with Christ; he would fain have Christ's image more lively pictured upon his soul." True grace is always progressive; as the saints are called lamps and stars, in regard of their light, so trees of righteousness, (Isa. 61:3), for their growth: they are indeed like the tree of life, bringing forth several sorts of fruit.

(1). A true Christian grows in *beauty*. Grace is the best complexion of the soul; it is at the first plantation, like Rachel, fair to look upon; but still the more it lives, the more it sends forth its rays of beauty. Abraham's faith was at first beautiful; but at last did shine in its orient colours, and grew so illustrious, that God himself was in love with it, and makes his faith a pattern to all believers.

(2). A true Christian grows in *sweetness*. A poisonous weed may grow as much as the hyssop or rosemary, the poppy in the field as the corn, the crab as the pearmain; but the one hath a harsh sour taste, the other mellows as it grows: an hypocrite may grow in outward dimensions, as much as a child of God, he may pray as much, profess as much: but he grows only in magnitude, he brings forth only sour grapes, his duties are leavened with pride; the other

ripens as he grows; he grows in love, humility, faith, which do mellow and sweeten his duties, and make them come off with a better relish. The believer grows as the flower, he casts a fragrancy and perfume.

(3). A true Christian grows in *strength*: he grows still more rooted and settled. The more the tree grows, the more it spreads its root in the earth: a Christian who is a plant of the heavenly Jerusalem, the longer he grows, the more he incorporates into Christ, and sucks spiritual juice and sap from him; he is a dwarf in regard of humility, but a giant in regard of strength, — he is strong to do duties, to bear burdens, resist temptations.

He grows in *the exercise of his grace*; he hath not only oil in his lamp, but his lamp is also burning and shining. Grace is agile and dexterous. Christ's vine do flourish, (Cant. 6:11); hence we read of "a lively hope," (1 Pet. 1:3) and "a fervent love," (1 Pet. 1:22); here is the activity of grace. Indeed sometimes grace is a sleepy habit of the soul, like sap in the vine, not exerting its vigour, which may be occasioned through spiritual sloth, or by reason of falling into some sin; but this is only for a while: the spring of grace will come, "the flowers will appear, and the figtree put forth her green figs." The fresh gales of the Spirit do sweetly revive and refacilitate grace. The church of Christ, whose heart was a garden, and her graces as precious spices, prays for the heavenly breathings of the Spirit, that her sacred spices might flow out, (Cant. 6:16).

(4). A true Christian grows *both in the kind and in the degree of grace*. To his spiritual living he gets an augmentation, he adds to "faith, virtue: to virtue, knowledge: to knowledge, temperance," &c. (2 Pet. 1:5, 6). Here is grace growing in its kind. And he goes on "from faith to faith," (Rom. 1:17); there is grace growing in the degree; "we are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because your faith groweth exceedingly," (2 Thess. 1:3); it increaseth over and above. And the apostle speaks of those spiritual plants which were laden with gospel-fruit, (Phil. 1:11). A Christian is compared to the vine, (an emblem of fruitfulness) he must bear full clusters: we are bid to perfect that which is lacking in our faith, (1 Thess. 3:10). A Christian must never be so old as to be past bearing; he brings forth fruit in his old age, (Psa. 92:14). An heaven-born plant is ever growing; he never thinks he grows enough; he is

not content unless he add every day one cubit to his spiritual stature. We must not be content just with so much grace as will keep life and soul together, a drachm or two will not suffice, but we must be still increasing, “with the increase of God,” (Col. 2:19). We had need renew our strength as the eagle, (Isa. 40:31). Our sins are renewed, our wants are renewed, our tentations are renewed, and shall not our strength be renewed? O be not content with the first *embryo* of grace; grace in its infancy and minority! You look for degrees of glory, be ye Christians of degrees. Though a believer should be contented with a *modicum* on his estate, yet not with a *modicum* in religion. A Christian of the right breed labours still to excel himself, and come nearer to that holiness in God, who is the original, the pattern, and prototype of all holiness.

CHAPTER XIII

Use IV. Showing how a Christian may know whether he hath learned this Divine Art.

Thus having laid down these three cautions, I proceed, in the next place, to an use of trial. How may a Christian know that he hath learned this lesson of contentment? I shall lay down some characters by which you shall know it.

1. A contented spirit is a *silent* spirit; he hath not one word to say against God; “I was dumb and silent, because thou didst it,” (Psa. 39:9). Contentment silenceth all dispute: “he sitteth alone and keepeth silence,” (Lam. 3:28). There is a sinful silence; when God is dishonoured, his truth wounded, and men hold their peace, this silence is a loud sin; and there is a holy silence, when the soul sits down quiet and content with its condition. When Samuel tells Eli that heavy message from God, that he would “judge his house, and that the iniquity of his family should not be purged away with sacrifice forever,” (1 Sam. 3:13,14), doth Eli murmur or dispute? no, he hath not one word to say against God: “it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.” A discontented spirit saith as Pharaoh, “who is the Lord?” why should I suffer all this? why should I be brought into this low condition? “who is the Lord?” But a gracious heart saith, as Eli, “it is the Lord,” let him do what he will with me. When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had offered up strange

fire, and fire went from the Lord and devoured them, (Lev. 10:1), is Aaron now in a passion of discontent? no, "Aaron held his peace." A contented spirit is never angry unless with himself for having hard thoughts of God. When Jonah said, "I do well to be angry," this was not a contented spirit, it did not become a prophet.

2. A contented spirit is a *cheerful* spirit; the Greeks call it *euthema*. Contentment is something more than patience; for patience denotes only submission, contentment denotes cheerfulness. A contented Christian is more than passive; he doth not only bear the cross, but take up the cross, (Matt. 6:24). He looks upon God as a wise God; and whatever he doth, though it be not willingly, yet sensibly, it is in order to a cure. Hence the contented Christian is cheerful, and with the apostle, "takes pleasure in infirmities, distresses," &c (2 Cor. 12:10). He doth not only submit to God's dealings, but rejoice in them; he doth not only say, "just is the Lord in all that hath befallen me," but "good is the Lord." This is to be contented. A sullen melancholy is hateful. It is said, "God loveth a cheerful giver," (2 Cor. 9:7), aye and God loves a cheerful liver. We are bid in Scripture, "not to be careful," but we are not bid not to be cheerful. He that is contented with his condition, doth not abate of his spiritual joy; and indeed he hath that within him which is the ground of cheerfulness; he carries a pardon sealed in his heart, (Matt. 9:2).

3. A contented spirit is a *thankful* spirit. This is a degree above the other; "in every thing giving thanks," (1 Thess. 5:18). A gracious heart spies mercy in every condition, therefore hath his heart screwed up to thankfulness; others will bless God for prosperity, he blesseth him for affliction. Thus he reasons with himself; am I in want? God sees it better for me to want than to abound; God is now dieting of me, he sees it better for my spiritual health sometimes to be kept fasting; therefore he doth not only submit but is thankful. The malcontent is ever complaining of his condition; the contented spirit is ever giving thanks. O what height of grace is this! A contented heart is a temple where the praises of God are sung forth, not a sepulchre wherein they are buried. A contented Christian in the greatest straits hath his heart enlarged and dilated in thankfulness; he oft contemplates God's love in

election; he sees that he is a monument of mercy, therefore desires to be a pattern of praise. There is always gratulatory music in a contented soul; the Spirit of grace works in the heart like new wine, which under the heaviest pressures of sorrow will have a vent open for thankfulness: this is to be content.

4. He that is content, *no condition comes amiss to him*; so it is in the text, “in whatever state I am.” A contented Christian can turn himself to anything; either want or abound. The people of Israel knew neither how to abound, nor yet how to want; when they were in want they murmured; “can God prepare a table in the wilderness?” and when they ate, and were filled, then they lifted up the heel. Paul knew how to manage every state; he could be either a note higher or lower; he was in this sense an universalist, he could do anything that God would have him: if he were in prosperity, he knew how to be thankful; if in adversity, he knew how to be patient; he was neither lifted up with the one, nor cast down with the other. He could carry a greater sail, or lesser. Thus a contented Christian knows how to turn himself to any condition. We have those who can be contented in some condition, but not in every estate; they can be content in a wealthy estate, when they have the streams of milk and honey; while Gods candle shines upon their head, now they are content, but if the wind turn and be against them, now they are discontented. While they have a silver crutch to lean upon, they are contented; but if God breaks this crutch, now they are discontented. But Paul had learned in every estate to carry himself with an equanimity of mind. Others could be content with their affliction, so God would give them leave to pick and choose. They could be content to bear such a cross; they could better endure sickness than poverty, or bear loss of estate than loss of children; if they might have such a man’s cross they could be content. A contented Christian doth not go to choose his cross, but leaves God to choose for him; he is content both for the kind and the duration. A contented spirit saith, “let God apply what medicine he pleaseth, and let it lie on as long as it will; I know when it hath done its cure, and eaten the venom of sin out of my heart, God will take it off again.”

In a word, a contented Christian, being sweetly captivated under

the authority of the word, desires to be wholly at God's disposal, and is willing to live in that sphere and climate where God has set him. And if at any time he hath been an instrument of doing noble and brave service in the public, he knows he is but a rational tool, a servant to authority, and is content to return to his former condition of life. Cincinnatus, after he had done worthily, and purchased to himself great fame in his dictatorship, did notwithstanding afterwards voluntary return to till and manure his four acres of ground: thus should it be with Christians, professing godliness with contentment, having served Mars, daring to offend Jupiter; lest otherwise they discover only to the world a brutish valour, being so untamed and head-strong, that when they had conquered others, yet they are not able to rule their own spirits.

5. He that is contented with his condition, *to rid himself out of trouble, will not turn himself into sin.* I deny not but a Christian may lawfully seek to change his condition: so far as God's providence doth go before, he may follow. But when men will not follow providence but run before it, as he that said, "this evil is of the Lord, why should I wait any longer, (2 Kings 6:33). If God doth not open the door of his providence, they will break it open, and wind themselves out of affliction by sin; bringing their souls into trouble; this is far from holy contentation, this is unbelief broken into rebellion. A contented Christian is willing to wait God's leisure, and will not stir till God open a door. As Paul said in another case, "they have beaten us openly, uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison, and now do they thrust us out privily? nay, verily, but let them come themselves and fetch us out," (Acts 16:37): so, with reverence, saith the contented Christian, God hath cast me into this condition; and though it be sad, and troublesome, yet I will not stir, till God by a clear providence fetch me out. Thus those brave spirited Christians; "they accepted not deliverance," (Heb. 11:35), that is, upon base dishonourable terms. They would rather stay in prison than purchase their liberty by carnal compliance. Estius observes on the place, "they might not only have had their enlargements, but been raised to honour, and put into offices of trust, yet the honour of religion was dearer to them, than either liberty or honour." A

contented Christian will not remove, till as the Israelites he sees a pillar of cloud and fire going before him. "It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord," (Lam. 3:26). It is good to stay God's leisure and not to extricate ourselves out of trouble, till we see the star of God's providence pointing out a way to us.

CHAPTER XIV

Use V. Containing a Christian Directory, or Rules about Contentment.

I proceed now to an use of direction, to show Christians how they may attain to this divine art of contentation. Certainly it is feasible, others of God's saints have reached to it. St Paul here had it; and what do we think of those we read of in that little book of martyrs, (Heb. 11), who had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, who wandered about in deserts and caves, yet were contented; so that it is possible to be had. And here I shall lay down some rules for holy contentment.

Rule 1. Advance faith. All our disquiets do issue immediately from unbelief. It is this that raiseth the storm of discontent in the heart. O set faith a-work! It is the property of faith to silence our doubtings, to scatter our fears, to still the heart when the passions are up. Faith works the heart to a sweet serene composure; it is not having food and raiment, but having faith, which will make us content. Faith chides down passion; when reason begins to sink, let faith swim.

Question. *How doth faith work contentment?*

Answer 1. Faith shows the soul that whatever its trials are yet it is from the hand of a father; it is indeed a bitter cup, but "shall I not drink the cup which my father hath given me to drink?" It is in love to my soul: God corrects me with the same love he crowns me; God is now training me up for heaven; he carves me, to make me a polished shaft. These sufferings bring forth patience, humility, even the peaceful fruits of righteousness, (Heb. 12:11). And if God can bring such sweet fruit out of our stock, let him graft me where he pleases. Thus faith brings the heart to holy contentment.

Answer 2. Faith sucks the honey of contentment out of the hive

of the promise. Christ is the vine, the promises are the clusters of grapes that grow upon this vine, and faith presseth the sweet wine of contentment out of these spiritual clusters of the promises. I will show you but one cluster, “the Lord will give grace and glory,” (Psa. 84:11); here is enough for faith to live upon. The promise is the flower out of which faith distills the spirits and quintessence of divine contentment. In a word, faith carries up the soul, and makes it aspire after more generous and noble delights than the earth affords, and to live in the world above the world. Would ye live contented lives? Live up to the height of your faith.

Rule 2. Labour for assurance. O let us get the interest cleared between God and our souls! Interest is a word much in use, — a pleasing word, — interest in great friends, — interest-money. O, if there be an interest worth looking after, it is an interest between God and the soul! Labour to say, “my God.” To be without money, and without friends, and without God too, is sad; but he whose faith doth flourish into assurance, that can say, “I know whom I have believed,” (2 Tim. 1:2), that man hath enough to give his heart contentment. When a man’s debts are paid, and he can go abroad without fear of arresting, what contentment is this! O let your title be cleared! If God be ours, whatever we want in the creature, is infinitely made up in him. Do I want bread? I have Christ the bread of life. Am I under defilement? his blood is like the trees of the sanctuary; not only for meat, but medicine, (Ezek. 47:12). If any thing in the world be worth labouring for, it is to get sound evidences that God is ours. If this be once cleared, what can come amiss? No matter what storms I meet with, so that I know where to put in for harbour. He that hath God to be his God, is so well contented with his condition, that he doth not much care whether he hath anything else. To rest in a condition where a Christian cannot say God is his God, is matter of fear; and if he can say so truly, and yet is not contented, it is a matter of shame. “David encouraged himself in the Lord his God,” (1 Sam. 30:6). It was sad with him, Ziklag burnt, his wives taken captive, his all lost, and like to have lost his soldiers’ hearts too, (for they spake of stoning him,) yet he had the ground of contentment within him; an interest in God, and this was a pillar of supportment to his spirit.

He that knows God is his, and all that is in God is for his good, if this doth not satisfy, I know nothing that will.

Rule 3. Get an humble spirit. The humble man is the contented man; if his estate be low, his heart is lower than his estate, therefore be content. If his esteem in the world be low, he that is little in his own eyes will not be much troubled to be little in the eyes of others. He hath a meaner opinion of himself, than others can have of him. The humble man studies his own unworthiness; he looks upon himself as “less than the least of God’s mercies,” (Gen. 32:10): and then a little will content him: he cries out with Paul, that he is the chief of sinners, (1 Tim. 1:15), therefore doth not murmur, but admire. He doth not say his comforts are small, but his sins are great. He thinks it is mercy he is out of hell, therefore he is contented. He doth not go to carve out a more happy condition to himself; he knows the worst piece God cuts him is better than he deserves. A proud man is never contented; he is one that hath an high opinion of himself; therefore under small blessings is disdainful, under small crosses impatient. The humble spirit is the contented spirit; if his cross be light, he reckons it the inventory of his mercies; if it be heavy, yet he takes it upon his knees, knowing that when his estate is worse, it is to make him the better. Where you lay humility for the foundation, contentment will be the superstructure.

Rule 4. Keep a clear conscience. Contentment is the manna that is laid up in the ark of a good conscience: O take heed of indulging any sin! it is as natural for guilt to breed disquiet, as for putrid matter to breed vermin. Sin lies as Jonah in the ship, it raiseth a tempest. If dust or motes be gotten into the eye, they make the eye water, and cause a soreness in it; if the eye be clear, then it is free from that soreness; if sin be gotten into the conscience, which is as the eye of the soul, then grief and disquiet breed there; but keep the eye of conscience clear, and all is well. What Solomon saith of a good stomach, I may say of a good conscience, “to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet,” (Prov. 27:7): so to a good conscience every bitter thing is sweet; it can pick contentment out of the cross. A good conscience turns the waters of Marah into wine. Would you have a quiet heart? Get a smiling conscience. I wonder not to hear

Paul say he was in every state content, when he could make that triumph, “I have lived in all good conscience to this day.” When once a man’s reckonings are clear, it must needs let in abundance of contentment into the heart. Good conscience can suck contentment out of the bitterest drug, under slanders; “our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,” (2 Cor. 1:12). In case of imprisonment, Paul had his prison songs, and could play the sweet lessons of contentment, when his feet were in the stocks, (Acts 16:25). Augustine calls it “the paradise of a good conscience;” and if it be so, then in prison we may be in paradise. When the times are troublesome, a good conscience makes a calm. If conscience be clear, what though the days be cloudy? is it not a contentment to have a friend always by to speak a good word for us? Such a friend is conscience. A good conscience, as David’s harp, drives away the evil spirit of discontent. When thoughts begin to arise, and the heart is disquieted, conscience saith to a man, as the king did to Nehemiah, “why is thy countenance sad?” so saith conscience, hast not thou the seed of God in thee? art not thou an heir of the promise? hast not thou a treasure that thou canst never be plundered of? why is thy countenance sad? O keep conscience clear, and you shall never want contentment! For a man to keep the pipes of his body, the veins and arteries, free from colds and obstructions, is the best way to maintain health: so, to keep conscience clear, and to preserve it from the obstructions of guilt, is the best way to maintain contentment. First, conscience is pure, and then peaceable.

Rule 5. Learn to deny yourselves. Look well to your affections, bridle them in. Do two things: 1. *Mortify your desires*; 2. *Moderate your delights*.

1. *Mortify your desires*. We must not be of the dragon’s temper, who, they say, is so thirsty, that no water will quench his thirst: “mortify therefore your inordinate affections,” (Col. 3:5). In the Greek it is your evil affections; to show that our desires, when they are inordinate, are evil. Crucify your desires; be as dead men; a dead man hath no appetite.

Question. *How should a Christian martyr his desires?*

Answer 1. Get a right judgment of the things here below; they are mean beggarly things; “wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is

not?” (Prov. 23:5). The appetite must be guided by reason; the affections are the feet of the soul; therefore they must follow the judgment, not lead it.

Answer 2. Often seriously meditate of mortality: death will soon crop these flowers which we delight in, and pull down the fabric of those bodies which we so garnish and beautify. Think, when you are looking up your money in your chest, who shall shortly lock you up in your coffin.

2. *Moderate your delights.* Set not your heart too much upon any creature, (Isa. 62:10), what we over-love, we shall over-grieve. Rachel set her heart too much upon her children, and when she had lost them, she lost herself too; such a vein of grief was opened as could not be staunched, “she refused to be comforted.” Here was discontent. When we let any creature lie too near our heart, when God pulls away that comfort, a piece of our heart is rent away with it. Too much fondness ends in frowardness. Those that would be content in the want of mercy, must be moderate in the enjoyment. Jonathan dipt the rod in honey, he did not thrust it in. Let us take heed of ingulphing ourselves in pleasure; better have a spare diet, than, by having too much, to surfeit.

Rule 6. Get much of heaven into your heart. Spiritual things satisfy; the more of heaven is in us, the less earth will content us. He that hath once tasted the love of God, (Psa. 63:5), his thirst is much quenched towards sublunary things; the joys of God’s Spirit are heart-filling and heart-cheering joys; he that hath these, hath heaven begun in him, (Rom. 14:27) and shall not we be content to be in heaven? O get a sublime heart, “seek those things which are above,” (Col. 3:1). Fly aloft in your affections, thirst after the graces and comforts of the Spirit; the eagle that flies above in the air, fears not the stinging of the serpent; the serpent creeps on his belly, and stings only such creatures as go upon the earth.

Rule 7. Look not so much on the dark side of your condition, as on the light. God doth chequer his providences, white and black, as the pillar of the cloud had its light side and dark: look on the light side of the estate; who looks on the back side of a landscape? Suppose thou art cast in a law-suit, there is the dark

side; yet thou hast some land left, there is the light side. Thou hast sickness in thy body, there is the dark side; but grace in thy soul, there is the light side. Thou hast a child taken away, there is the dark side; thy husband lives, there is the light side. God's providences in this life are variously represented by those speckled horses among the myrtle-trees which were red and white! (Zech. 1:8). Mercies and afflictions are interwoven: God doth speckle his work. O, saith one, I want such a comfort! but weigh all thy mercies in the balance, and that will make thee content. If a man did want a finger, would he be so discontented for the loss of that, as not to be thankful for all the other parts and joints of his body? Look on the light side of your condition, and then all your discontents will easily disband; do not pore upon your losses, but ponder upon your mercies. What! wouldest thou have no cross at all? Why should one man think to have all good things, when himself is good but in part; wouldest thou have no evil about thee, who hast so much evil in thee? Thou art not fully sanctified in this life, how then thinkest thou to be fully satisfied? Never look for perfection of contentment till there be perfection of grace.

Rule 8. Consider in what a posture we stand here in the world.

1. We are in a *military* condition, we are soldiers, (2 Tim. 2:3), now a soldier is content with any thing: what though he hath not his stately house, his rich furniture, his soft bed, his full table, yet he doth not complain; he can lie on straw as well as down; he minds not his lodging, but his thoughts run upon dividing the spoil, and the garland of honour shall be set upon his head; and for hope of this, is he content to run any hazard, endure any hardship. Were it not absurd to hear him complain, that he wants such provision and is fain to lie out in the fields? A Christian is a military person, he fights the Lord's battles, he is Christ's ensignbearer. Now, what though he endures hard fate, and the bullets fly about? He fights for a crown, and therefore must be content.

2. We are in a *peregrine* condition, pilgrims and travellers. A man that is in a strange country, is contented with any diet or usage, he is glad of any thing; though he hath not that respect or

attendance which he looks for at home, nor is capable of the privileges and immunities of that place, he is content; he knows, when he comes into his own country, he hath lands to inherit, and there he shall have honour and respect: so it is with a child of God, he is in a pilgrim condition; “I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were,” (Psa. 39:12). Therefore let a Christian be content; he is in the world, but not of the world: he is born of God, and is a citizen of the New Jerusalem, (Heb. 12:22) therefore, though “he hunger and thirst, and have no certain dwelling-place,” (1 Cor. 4:11), yet he must be content: it will be better when he comes into his own country.

3. We are in a *mendicant* condition; we are beggars, we beg at heaven’s gate, “give us this day our daily bread;” we live upon God’s alms, therefore must be content with any thing; a beggar must not pick and choose, he is contented with the refuse. Oh, why dost thou murmur that art a beggar, and art fed out of the alms-basket of God’s providence?

Rule 9. Let not your hope depend upon these outward things. Lean not upon sandy pillars; we oft build our comfort upon such a friend or estate; and when that prop is removed, all our joy is gone, and our hearts begin either to fail or fret. A lame man leans on his crutches; and if they break, he is undone. Let not thy contentment go upon crutches, which may soon fail; the ground of contentment must be within thyself. The Greek word which is used for contentment signifies self-sufficiency. A Christian hath that from within that is able to support him; that strength of faith, and good hope through grace, as bears up his heart in the deficiency of outward comforts. The philosophers of old, when their estates were gone, yet could take contentment in the goods of the mind, learning and virtue: and shall not a believer much more in the graces of the Spirit, that rich enamel and embroidery of the soul? Say with thyself, “if friends leave me, if riches take wings, yet I have that within which comforts me, an heavenly treasure; when the blossoms of my estate are blown off, still there is the sap of contentment in the root of my heart; I have still an interest in God, and that interest cannot be broken off.” O never place your felicity in these dull and beggarly things here below!

Rule 10. Let us often compare our condition. Make this fivefold comparison.

1. Let us compare our condition and our *desert* together; if we have not what we desire, we have more than we deserve. For our mercies, we have deserved less; for our afflictions, we have deserved more.

(1). In regard of our mercies, we have deserved less. What can we deserve? Can man be profitable to the Almighty? We live upon free grace. Alexander gave a great gift to one of his subjects; the man being much taken with it, “this,” saith he, “is more than I am worthy of.” “I do not give thee this,” saith the king, “because thou art worthy of it, but I give a gift like Alexander.” Whatever we have is not merit, but bounty; the least bit of bread is more than God owes us; we can bring faggots to our own burning, but not one flower to the garland of our salvation; he that hath the least mercy, will die in God’s debt.

(2). In regard of our afflictions, we have deserved more: “thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve,” (Exod. 9:13). Is our condition sad? we have deserved it should be worse. Hath God taken away our estate from us? he might have taken away Christ from us. Hath he thrown us into prison? he might have thrown us into hell; he might as well damn us, as whip us; this should make us contented.

2. Let us compare our condition with *others*; and this will make us content. We look at them who are above us, let us look at them who are below us; we can see one in his silks, another in his sackcloth; one hath the waters of a full cup wrung out to him, another is mingling his drink with tears; how many pale faces do we behold, whom not sickness, but want hath brought into a consumption! Think of this, and be content. It is worse with them, who perhaps deserve better than we, and are higher in God’s favour. Am I in prison? Was not Daniel in a worse place? the lion’s den. Do I live in a mean cottage? look on them who are banished from their houses. We read of the primitive saints, “that they wandered in sheep’s skins and goats’ skins, of whom the world was not worthy,” (Heb. 11:37, 38). Hast thou a gentle fit of an ague? look on them who are tormented with the stone and gout, &c.

Others of God's children have had greater afflictions, and have borne them better than we. Daniel fed upon pulse and drank water, yet was fairer than they who ate of the king's portion, (Dan. 1:15); some Christians who have been in a lower condition, that have fed upon pulse and water, have looked better, been more patient and contented than we who enjoy abundance. Do others rejoice in affliction, and do we repine? Can they take up their cross and walk cheerfully under it, and do we under a lighter cross murmur?

3. Let us compare our condition with *Christ's upon earth*. What a poor, mean condition was He pleased to be in for us? he was contented with any thing. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor," (2 Cor. 8:9). He could have brought down an house from heaven with him, or challenged the high places of the earth, but he was contented to be in the wine-press, that we might be in the wine-cellar, and to live poor that we might be rich; the manger was his cradle, the cobwebs his canopy; he who is now preparing mansions for us in heaven, had none for himself on earth, "he had no where to lay his head." Christ came in *forma pauperis*; who, "being in the form of God, took upon him the form of a servant," (Phil. 2:7). We read not of any sums of money He had; when he wanted money, he was fain to work a miracle for it, (Matt. 17:27). Jesus Christ was in a low condition, he was never high, but when he was lifted up upon the cross, and that was his humility: he was content to live poor, and die cursed. O compare your condition with Christ's!

4. Let us compare our condition with *what it was once*, and this will make us content.

(1). Let us compare our spiritual estate with what it was once. What were we when we lay in our blood? we were heirs apparent to hell, having no right to pluck one leaf from the tree of promise; it was a Christless and hopeless condition, (Eph. 2. 12) :but now God hath cut off the entail of hell and damnation; he hath taken you out of the wild olive of nature, and ingrafted you into Christ, making you living branches of that living vine; he hath not only caused the light to shine upon you, but into you, (2 Cor. 6:6), and hath interested you in all the privileges of sonship: is not here that which may make the soul content.

(2). Let us compare our temporal estate with what it was once. Alas! we had nothing when we stepped out of the womb; “for we brought nothing into this world,” (1 Tim. 6:7). If we have not that which we desire, we have more than we did bring with us; we brought nothing with us but sin; other creatures bring something with them into the world; the lamb brings wool, the silk-worm silk, &c. but we brought nothing with us. What if our condition at present be low? It is better than it was once; therefore, having food and raiment, let us be content. Whatever we have, God’s providence fetcheth it unto us; and if we lose all, yet we have as much as we brought with us. This was what made Job content, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb” (Job 1:21); as if he had said, though God hath taken away all from me, yet why should I murmur? I am as rich as I was when I came into the world? I have as much left as I brought with me; naked came I hither; therefore blessed be the name of the Lord.

5. Let us compare our condition with *what it shall be shortly*. There is a time shortly coming, when, if we had all the riches of India, they would do us no good; we must die, and can carry nothing with us; so saith the apostle, “it is certain we can carry nothing out of the world,” (1 Tim. 6:7); therefore it follows, “having food and raiment, let us therewith be content.” Open the rich man’s grave and see what is there; you may find the miser’s bones, but not his riches, says Bede. Were we to live for ever here, or could we carry our riches into another world, then indeed we might be discontented, when we look upon our empty bags. But it is not so; God may presently seal a warrant for death to apprehend us: and when we die, we cannot carry estate with us: honour and riches descend not into the grave, why then are we troubled at our outward condition? Why do we disguise ourselves with discontent? O lay up a stock of grace! Be rich in faith and good works, these riches will follow us, (Rev. 14:13). No other coin but grace will pass current in heaven, silver and gold will not go there; labour to be rich towards God, (Luke 12:21), and as for other things, be not solicitous, we shall carry nothing with us.

Rule 11. Go not to bring your condition to your mind, but bring your mind to your condition. The way for a Christian to be

contented, is not by raising his estate higher, but by bringing his spirit lower; not by making his barns wider, but his heart narrower. One man, a whole lordship or manor will not content; another is satisfied with a few acres of land; what is the difference? The one studies to satisfy curiosity, the other necessity; the one thinks what he may have, the other what he may spare.

Rule 12. Study the vanity of the creature. It matters not whether we have less or more of these things, they have vanity written upon the frontispiece of them; the world is like a shadow that declineth; it is delightful, but deceitful; it promiseth more than we find, and it fails us when we have most need of it. All the world rings changes, and is constant only in its disappointments: what then, if we have less of that which is at best but voluble and fluid? The world is as full of mutation as motion; and what if God cut us short in sublunaries? The more a man hath to do with the world, the more he hath to do with vanity. The world may be compared to ice, which is smooth, but slippery; or to the Egyptian temples, without very beautiful and sumptuous, but within nothing to be seen but the image of an ape; every creature saith concerning satisfaction, it is not in me. The world is not a filling, but a flying comfort. It is like a game at tennis; providence bandies her golden balls, first to one, then to another. Why are we discontented at the loss of these things, but because we expect that from them which is not, and repose that in them which we ought not? “Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd,” (Jonah. 4:6). What a vanity was it? Is it much to see a withering gourd smitten? Or to see the moon dressing itself in a new shape and figure?

Rule 13. Get fancy regulated. It is the fancy which raiseth the price of things above their real worth. What is the reason one tulip is worth five pounds, another perhaps not worth one shilling? Fancy raiseth the price; the difference is rather imaginary than real; so, why it should be better to have thousands than hundreds, is, because men fancy it so; if we could fancy a lower condition better, as having less care in it, and less account, it would be far more eligible. The water that springs out of the rock, drinks as sweet as if it came out a golden chalice; things are as we fancy them. Ever since the fall, the fancy is distempered; God saw that the

imagination of the thoughts of his heart were evil, (Gen. 6:5). Fancy looks through wrong spectacles; pray that God will sanctify your fancy; a lower condition would content, if the mind and fancy were set right. Diogenes preferred his cynical life before Alexander's royalty: he fancied his little cloister best. Fabricius a poor man, yet despised the gold of king Pyrrhus. Could we cure a distempered fancy, we might soon conquer a discontented heart.

Rule 14. Consider how little will suffice nature. The body is but a small continent, and is easily recruited. Christ hath taught us to pray for our daily bread; nature is content with a little. Not to thirst, not to starve, is enough, saith Gregory Nazianzen; meat and drink are a Christian's riches, saith St Hierom; and the apostle saith, "having food and raiment let us be content." The stomach is sooner filled than the eye; how quickly would a man be content, if he would study rather to satisfy his hunger than his humour.

Rule 15. Believe the present condition is best for us. Flesh and blood is not a competent judge. Surfeiting stomachs are for banqueting stuff, but a man that regards his health, is rather for solid food. Vain men fancy such a condition best and would flourish in their bravery; whereas a wise Christian hath his will melted into God's will, and thinks it best to be at his finding. God is wise, he knows whether we need food or physic; and if we could acquiesce in providence, the quarrel would soon be at an end. O what a strange creature would man be, if he were what he could wish himself! Be content to be at God's allowance; God knows which is the fittest pasture to put his sheep in; sometimes a more barren ground doth well, whereas rank pasture may rot. Do I meet with such a cross? God shows me what the world is; he hath no better way to wean me, than by putting me to a step-mother. Doth God stint me in my allowance? he is now dieting me. Do I meet with losses? it is, that God may keep me from being lost. Every cross wind shall at last blow me to the right port. Did we believe that condition best which God doth parcel out to us, we should cheerfully submit, and say, "the lines are fallen in pleasant places."

Rule 16. Do not too much indulge the flesh. We have taken an oath in baptism to forsake the flesh. The flesh is a worse enemy

than the devil, it is a bosom-traitor; an enemy within is worst. If there were no devil to tempt, the flesh would be another Eve, to tempt to the forbidden fruit. O take heed of giving way to it! Whence is all our discontent but from the fleshy part? The flesh puts us upon the immoderate pursuit of the world; it consults for ease and plenty, and if it be not satisfied, then discontent begins to arise. O let it not have the reins! Martyr the flesh! In spiritual things the flesh is a sluggard, in secular things an horse-leech, crying "give, give." The flesh is an enemy to suffering: it will sooner make a man a courtier, than a martyr. O keep it under! Put its neck under Christ's yoke, stretch and nail it to his cross; never let a Christian look for contentment in his spirit, till there be confinement in his flesh.

Rule 17. Meditate much on the glory which shall be revealed.

There are great things laid up in heaven. Though it be sad for the present yet let us be content in that it shortly will be better; it is but a while and we shall be with Christ, bathing ourselves in the fountain of love; we shall never complain of wants and injuries any more; our cross may be heavy, but one sight of Christ will make us forget all our former sorrows. There are two things that should give contentment.

1. That *God will make us able to bear our troubles*, (1 Cor. 10:13). God, saith Chrysostom, doth like a lutanist, who will not let the strings of his lute be too slack lest it spoil the music of prayer and repentance? nor yet too much adversity, "lest the spirit fail before me; and the souls that I have made," (Isa. 57:16).

2. *When we have suffered a while, we shall be perfected in glory*; the cross shall be our ladder by which we shall climb up to heaven. Be then content, and then the scene will alter; God will ere long turn our water into wine; the hope of this is enough to drive away all distempers from the heart. Blessed be God, it will be better: "we have no continuing city here," therefore our afflictions cannot continue. A wise man looks still to the end; "The end of the just man is peace," (Psa. 37:37). Methinks the smoothness of the end should make amends for the ruggedness of the way. O eternity, eternity! Think often of the kingdom prepared. David was advanced

from the field to the throne: first he held his shepherd's staff, and shortly after the royal sceptre. God's people may be put to hard services here: but God hath chosen them to be kings, to sit upon the throne with the Lord Jesus. This being weighed in the balance of faith, would be an excellent means to bring the heart to contentment.

Rule 18. Be much in prayer. The last rule for contentment is, be much in prayer. Beg of God, that he will work our hearts to this blessed frame. "Is any man afflicted? let him pray," (Jam. 5:13); so, is any man discontented? let him pray. Prayer gives vent: the opening of a vein lets out bad blood; when the heart is filled with sorrow and disquiet, prayer lets out the bad blood. The key of a prayer oiled with tears, unlocks the heart of all its discontents. Prayer is an holy spell, or charm, to drive away trouble; prayer is the unbosoming of the soul, the unloading of all our cares in God's breast; and this ushers in sweet contentment. When there is any burden upon our spirits, by opening our mind to a friend we find our hearts finely eased and quieted. It is not our strong resolutions, but our strong request to God, which must give the heart ease in trouble; by prayer the strength of Christ comes into the soul, and where that is, a man is able to go through any condition. Paul could be in every state content; but that you may not think he was able to do this himself, he tells you that though he could want and abound, and "do all things;" yet it was through Christ strengthening him, (Phil. 4:13). It is the child that writes, but it is the scrivener that guides his hand.

CHAPTER XV

Use VI. Of Consolation to the Contented Christian.

The last use is of comfort, or an encouraging word to the contented Christian. If there be an heaven upon earth thou hast it. O Christian! thou mayest insult over thy troubles, and with the leviathan laugh at the shaking of a spear, (Job 41:7). What shall I say? Thou art a crown to thy profession; thou dost hold it out to all the world, that there is virtue enough in religion to give the soul contentment; thou showest the highest of grace. When grace is crowning, it is not so much for us to be content; but when grace is

conflicting, and meets with crosses, temptations, agonies; now to be content, this is a glorious thing indeed.

To a contented Christian, I shall say two things for a farewell.

1. *God is exceedingly taken with such a frame of heart.* God saith of a contented Christian, as David once said of Goliath's sword, "there is none like that, give it me." If you would please God, and be men of his heart, be contented. God hates a froward spirit.

2. *The contented Christian shall be no loser.* What lost Job by his patience? God gave him twice as much as he had before. What lost Abraham by his contentment? he was content to leave his country at God's call: the Lord makes a covenant with him, that he would be his God: he changeth his name; no more Abram, but Abraham, the father of many nations, (Gen. 17): God makes his seed as the stars of heaven; nay, honours him with this title, "the father of the faithful," (Gen. 18:17): the Lord makes known his secrets to him, "shall I hide from Abraham the things that I will do?" God settles a rich inheritance upon him, that land which was a type of heaven, and afterwards translated him to the blessed paradise. God will be sure to reward the contented Christian. As our Saviour said in another case to Nathaniel, "because I said I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these," (John. 1:50): so I say, art thou contented (O Christian) with a little? thou shalt see greater things than these. God will distill the sweet influences of his love into thy soul; he will raise thee up friends; he will bless the oil in the cruise; and when that is done, He will crown thee with an eternal enjoyment of himself; he will give thee heaven, where thou shalt have as much contentment as thy soul can possibly thirst after.

The fourth of four booklets.

