

THE ART OF DIVINE CONTENTMENT

**PART
ONE**



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The Art of Divine Contentment — Part One

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An Exposition of Philippians 4:11

“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”

CHAPTER I

The Introduction to the Text.

These words are brought in by way of prolepsis to anticipate and prevent an objection. The apostle had, in the former verse, laid down many grave and heavenly exhortations: among the rest, “to be careful for nothing.” Not to exclude,

1. A *prudential* care; for, he that provideth not for his own house, “hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel,” (1 Tim. 5:8). Nor,

2. a *religious* care; for we must give all “diligence to make our calling and election sure,” (2 Pet. 1:10). But,

3. to exclude all *anxious* care about the issues and events of things; “take no thought for your life, what you shall eat,” (Matt. 6:25). And in this sense it should be a Christian’s care not to be careful. The word careful in the Greek comes from the primitive, that signifies “to cut the heart in pieces,” a soul-dividing care; take heed of this. We are bid to “commit our way unto the Lord,” (Psa. 37:5); the Hebrew word is, “roll thy way upon the Lord.” It is our work to cast away care, (1 Pet. 5:7); and it is God’s work to take care.

By our immoderacy we take his work out of his hand. Care, when it is eccentric, either distrustful or distracting, is very dishonourable to God; it takes away his providence, as if he sat in heaven and minded not what became of things here below; like a man that makes a clock, and then leaves it to go for itself. Immoderate care takes the heart off from better things; and usually while we are thinking how we shall do to live, we forget how to die. Care is a spiritual canker that doth waste and dispirit; we may sooner by our care add a furlong to our grief than a cubit to our comfort. God doth threaten it as a curse, “they shall eat their bread

with carefulness,” (Ezek. 12:1). Better fast than eat of that bread. “Be careful for nothing.”

Now, lest any one should say, yea, Paul thou preachest that to us which thou hast scarce learned thyself; hast thou learned not to be careful? the apostle seemed tacitly to answer that, in the words of the text; “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content:” a speech worthy to be engraven upon our hearts, and to be written in letters of gold upon the crowns and diadems of princes.

The text doth branch itself into these two general parts. I. The scholar, Paul; “I have learned.” II. The lesson; “in every state to be content.”

CHAPTER II

The First Branch of the Text. I. The Scholar, with the First Proposition.

I begin with the first: The scholar, and his proficiency; “I have learned.” Out of which I shall by the bye, observe two things by way of paraphrase. The apostle doth not say, I have *heard*, that in every estate I should be content: but, I have *learned*. Whence our first doctrine, that **it is not enough for Christians to hear their duty, but they must learn their duty**. It is one thing to hear and another thing to learn; as it is one thing to eat and another thing to concoct. St Paul was a practitioner. Christians hear much, but it is to be feared, learn little. There were four sorts of grounds in the parable, (Luke 8:5), and but one good ground: an emblem of this truth, many hearers, but few learners.

There are two things which keep us from learning.

1. *Slighting what we hear*. Christ is the pearl of price; when we disesteem this pearl, we shall never learn either its value, or its virtue. The gospel is a rare mystery; in one place, (Acts 20:24), it is called “the gospel of grace;” in another, (1 Cor. 4:4), “the gospel of glory;” because in it, as in a transparent glass, the glory of God is resplendent. But he that hath learned to contemn this mystery, will hardly ever learn to obey it; he that looks upon the things of heaven as things by the bye, and perhaps the driving of a trade, or carrying on some politic design to be of greater importance, this man is in

the high road to damnation, and will hardly ever learn the things of his peace. Who will learn that which he thinks is scarce worth learning?

2. *Forgetting what we hear.* If a scholar have his rules laid before him, and he forgets them as fast as he reads them, he will never learn, (Jam. 1:25). Aristotle calls the memory the scribe of the soul; and Bernard calls it the stomach of the soul, because it hath a retentive faculty, and turns heavenly food into blood and spirits; we have great memories in other things, we remember that which is vain. Cyrus could remember the name of every soldier in his huge army. We remember injuries: this is to fill a precious cabinet with dung; but as Hierom saith, how soon do we forget the sacred truths of God? We are apt to forget three things: our faults, our friends, our instructions. Many Christians are like sieves; put a sieve into the water, and it is full; but take it forth of the water, and all runs out: so, while they are hearing a sermon, they remember something: but like the sieve out of the water, as soon as they are gone out of the church, all is forgotten. “Let these sayings, (saith Christ) sink down into your ears,” (Luke 9:44); in the original it is, “put these sayings into your ears,” as a man that would hide the jewel from being stolen, locks it up safe in his chest. Let them sink: the word must not fall only as dew that wets the leaf, but as rain which soaks to the root of the tree, and makes it fructify. O, how often doth Satan, that fowl of the air, pick up the good seed that is sown!

USE. Let me put you upon a serious trial. Some of you have heard much, — you have lived forty, fifty, sixty years under the blessed trumpet of the gospel, — what have you learned? You may have heard a thousand sermons, and yet not learned one. Search your consciences.

1. You have heard much *against sin*: are you hearers; or are you scholars? How many sermons have you heard against covetousness, that it is the root, on which pride, idolatry, treason do grow? One calls it a metropolitan sin; it is a complex evil, it doth twist a great many sins in with it. There is hardly any sin, but covetousness is a main ingredient of it; and yet are you like the two

daughters of the horse-leech, that cry, “give! give!” How much have you heard against rash anger, that is a short frenzy, a dry drunkenness; that it rests in the bosom of fools; and upon the least occasion do your spirits begin to take fire? How much have you heard against swearing: It is Christ’s express mandate, “swear not at all,” (Matt. 5:34). This sin of all others may be termed the unfruitful work of darkness. It is neither sweetened with pleasure, nor enriched with profit, the usual vermilion wherewith Satan doth paint sin. Swearing is forbidden with a *subpaena*. While the swearer shoots his oaths, like flying arrows at God to pierce his glory, God shoots “a flying roll” of curses against him. And do you make your tongue a racket by which you toss oaths as tennis balls? do you sport yourselves with oaths, as the Philistines did with Samson, which will at last pull the house about your ears? Alas! how have they learned what sin is, that have not learned to leave sin! Doth he know what a viper is, that will play with it?

2. You have heard much *of Christ*: have you learned Christ? The Jews, as Jerome saith, carried Christ in their Bibles, but not in their heart; their sound “went into all the earth,” (Rom. 10:18); the prophets and apostles were as trumpets, whose sound went abroad into the world: yet many thousands who heard the noise of these trumpets, had not learned Christ, “they have not all obeyed,” (Rom. 10:16).

(1). A man may *know* much of Christ, and yet not learn Christ: the devils knew Christ, (Matt. 1:24).

(2). A man may *preach* Christ, and yet not learn Christ, as Judas and the pseudo-apostles, (Phil. 5:15).

(3). A man may *profess* Christ, and yet not learn Christ: there are many professors in the world that Christ will profess against, (Matt. 7:22, 23).

Question. *What it is then to learn Christ?*

1. To learn Christ is to be *made like Christ*, to have the divine characters of his holiness engraven upon our hearts: “we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image,” (2 Cor. 3:18). There is a metamorphosis made; a sinner, viewing Christ’s image in the glass

of the gospel, is transformed into that image. Never did any man look upon Christ with a spiritual eye, but he went away quite changed. A true saint is a divine landscape picture, where all the rare beauties of Christ are lively portrayed and drawn forth; he hath the same spirit, the same judgment, the same will, with Jesus Christ.

2. To learn Christ, is to *believe in him*; “my Lord, and my God,” (John 20:28); when we do not only believe God, but in God, which is the actual application of Christ to ourselves, and as it were the spreading of the sacred medicine of his blood upon our souls. You have heard much of Christ, and yet cannot with an humble adherence say, “my Jesus;” be not offended if I tell you, the devil can say his creed as well as you.

3. To learn Christ, is to *love Christ*. When we have Bible-conversations, our lives like rich diamonds cast a sparkling lustre in the church of God, and are, in some sense, parallel with the life of Christ, as the transcript with the original. So much for the first notion of the word.

CHAPTER III

Concerning the Second Proposition.

This word, “I have learned,” is a word that imports difficulty; it shows how hardly the apostle came by contentment of mind; it was not bred in nature. St Paul did not come naturally by it, but he had learned it. It cost him many a prayer and tear, it was taught him by the Spirit. Whence our second doctrine: **good things are hard to come by**. The business of religion is not so facile as most do imagine. “I have learned,” saith St Paul. Indeed you need not learn a man to sin; this is natural, (Psa. 58:3), and therefore facile, it comes as water out of a spring, It is an easy thing to be wicked; hell will be taken without storm; but matters of religion must be learned. To cut the flesh is easy, but to prick a vein, and not to cut an artery is hard. The trade of sin needs not to be learned, but the art of divine contentment is not achieved without holy industry: “I have learned.”

There are two pregnant reasons, why there must be so much

study and exercitation:

1. Because *spiritual things are against nature*. Everything in religion is antipodes to nature. There are in religion two things, and both are against nature.

(1). Matters of faith: as, for men to be justified by the righteousness of another, to become a fool that he may be wise, to save all by losing all; this is against nature.

(2). Matters of practice: as, Self-denial; for a man to deny his own wisdom, and see himself blind; his own will, and have it melted into the will of God; plucking out the right eye, beheading and crucifying that sin which is the favourite, and lies nearest to the heart; for a man to be dead to the world, and in the midst of want to abound; for him to take up the cross, and follow Christ, not only in golden, but in bloody paths, to embrace religion, when it is dressed in night-clothes, all the jewels of honour and preferment being pulled off; this is against nature, and therefore must be learned. Self-examination; for a man to take his heart, as a watch, all in pieces; to set up a spiritual inquisition, or court of conscience, and traverse things in his own soul; to take David's candle and lantern, (Psa. 119:105), and search for sin; nay, as judge, to pass the sentence upon himself, (2 Sam. 34:17), this is against nature, and will not easily be attained to without learning. Self-reformation; to see a man, as Caleb, or another spirit, walking antipodes to himself, the current of his life altered, and running into the channel of religion: this is wholly against nature. When a stone ascends, it is not a natural motion, but a violent; the motion of the soul heaven-ward is a violent motion, it must be learned; flesh and blood is not skilled in these things; nature can no more cast out nature, than Satan can cast out Satan.

2. Because *spiritual things are above nature*. There are some things in nature that are hard to find out, as the cause of things, which are not learned without study. Aristotle, a great philosopher, whom some have called an eagle fallen from the clouds, yet could not find out the motion of the river Euripus, and therefore threw himself into it; what then are divine things, which are in sphere above nature, and beyond all human disquisition; as the Trinity, the

hypostatical union, the mystery of faith to believe against hope? Only God's Spirit can light our candle here. The apostle calls these "the deep things of God." The gospel is full of jewels, but they are locked up from sense and reason. The angels in heaven are searching into these sacred depths, (1 Pet. 3:22).

USE. Let us beg the Spirit of God to teach us; we must be "divinely taught;" the eunuch could read, but he could not understand, till Philip joined himself to his chariot, (Acts 8:29). God's Spirit must join himself to our chariot; he must teach, or we cannot learn: "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord," (Isa. 54:13). A man may read the figure on the dial, but he cannot tell how the day goes, unless the sun shines upon the dial: we may read the Bible over, but we can not learn the purpose, till the Spirit of God shines into our hearts, (2 Cor. 4:6). O implore this blessed Spirit! It is God's prerogative-royal to teach: "I am the Lord thy God, which teacheth thee to profit," (Isa. 48:17). Ministers may tell us our lesson, God only can teach us; we have lost both our hearing and eye-sight, therefore are very unfit to learn. Ever since Eve listened to the serpent, we have been deaf; and since she looked on the tree of knowledge we have been blind; but when God comes to teach, he removes these impediments, (Isa. 35:5). We are naturally dead, (Eph. 2:1); who will go about to teach a dead man? yet, behold, God undertakes to make dead men to understand mysteries! God is the grand teacher. This is the reason the word preached works so differently upon men; two in a pew, the one is wrought upon effectually, the other lies at the ordinances as a dead child at the breast, and gets no nourishment. What is the reason? Because the heavenly gale of the Spirit blows upon one, and not upon the other; one hath the anointing of God, which teacheth him all things! (1 John 2:27); the other hath it not. God's Spirit speaks sweetly, but irresistibly. In that heavenly doxology, none could sing the new song, but those who were sealed in their foreheads, (Rev. 14:2); reprobates could not sing it. Those that are skilful in the mysteries of salvation must have the seal of the Spirit upon them. Let us make this our prayer: Lord, breathe thy Spirit into thy word; and we have a promise, which

may add wings to prayer; “if ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13). And thus much of the first part of the text, the scholar, which I intended only as a short gloss or paraphrase.

CHAPTER IV

The Second Branch of the Text, the Lesson itself, with the Proposition.

II. I come to the second, which is the main thing, the lesson itself, “in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Here was a rare piece of learning indeed, and is certainly more to be wondered at in St Paul, that he knew how to turn himself to every condition, than all the learning in the world besides, which hath been so applauded in former ages, by Julius Cæsar, Ptolemy, Xenophon, the great admirers of learning. The text hath but few words in it; “in every state content:” but if that be true, which once Fulgentius said, that the most golden sentence is ever measured by brevity and suavity, then, this is a most accomplished speech; the text is like a precious jewel, little in quantity, but great in worth and value.

The main proposition I shall insist upon, is this, **that a gracious spirit is a contented spirit.** The doctrine of contentment is very superlative, and till we have learned this, we have not learned to be Christians.

1. *It is a hard lesson.* The angels in heaven had not learned it; they were not contented. Though their estate was very glorious, yet they were still soaring aloft, and aimed at something higher; “the angels which kept not their first estate.” They kept not their estate, because they were not contented with their estate. Our first parents, clothed with the white robe of innocency in paradise, had not learned to be content; they had aspiring hearts, and thinking their human nature too low and home-spun, would be crowned with the Deity, and “be as gods.” Though they had the choice of all the trees of the garden, yet none would content them but the tree of knowledge which they supposed would have been as eye-salve to

have made them omniscient. O then, if this lesson was so hard to learn in innocency, how hard shall we find it, who are clogged with corruption!

2. *It is of universal extent*, it concerns all.

First. It concerns *rich* men. One would think it needless to press those to contentment whom God hath blessed with great estates, but rather persuade them to be humble and thankful; nay, but I say, be content. Rich men have their discontents as well as others! When they have a great estate, yet they are discontented that they have no more; they would make the hundred talents a thousand. A man in wine, the more he drinks, the more he thirsts; covetousness is a dry dropsy; an earthly heart is like the grave, that is “never satisfied;” therefore I say to you, rich men, be content. Rich men, if we may suppose them to be content with their estates, which is seldom; yet, though they have estate enough, they have not honour enough: if their barns are full enough, yet their turrets are not high enough. They would be somebody in the world, as Theudas, “who boasted himself to be somebody,” (Acts 5:36). They never go so cheerfully as when the wind of honour and applause fills their sails; if this wind be down they are discontented. One would think Haman had as much as his proud heart could desire; he was set above all the princes, advanced upon the pinnacle of honour, to be the second man in the kingdom, (Esth. 3:1); yet in the midst of all his pomp, because Mordecai would not uncover and kneel, he is discontented, and full of wrath, and there was no way to assuage this pleurisy of revenge, but by letting all the Jews’ blood, and offering them up in sacrifice. The itch of honour is seldom allayed without blood; therefore I say to you rich men, be content. Rich men, if we may suppose them to be content with their honour and magnificent titles, yet they have not always contentment in their relations. She that lies in the bosom may sometimes blow the coals; as Job’s wife, who in a pet would have him fall out with God himself; “curse God, and die.” Sometimes children cause discontent. How often is it seen that the mother’s milk doth nourish a viper? and that he that once sucked her breast, goes about to suck her blood? Parents do often of grapes gather thorns,

and of figs thistles. Children are sweet-briar; like the rose, which is a fragrant flower, but hath its prickles. Our relative comforts are not all pure wine, but mixed; they have in them more dregs than spirits, and are like that river Plutarch speaks of, where the waters in the morning run sweet, but in the evening run bitter. We have no charter of exemption granted us in this life; therefore rich men had need be called upon to be content.

Secondly. The doctrine of contentment concerns *poor* men. You that do suck so liberally from the breasts of providence, be content; it is an hard lesson, therefore it had need be set upon the sooner. How hard is it when the livelihood is even gone, a great estate boiled away almost to nothing, then to be contented. The means of subsistence is in Scripture called our life, because it is the very sinews of life. The woman in the gospel spent “all her living upon the physicians,” (Luke 8:43); in the Greek it is, she spent her *whole life* upon the physicians, because she spent her means by which she should live. It is much when poverty hath clipped our wings then to be content; but, though hard, it is excellent; and the apostle here had “learned in every state to be content.” God had brought St Paul into as great variety of conditions as ever we read of any man, and yet he was content; else sure he could never have gone through it with so much cheerfulness. See into what vicissitudes this blessed apostle was cast: “we are troubled on every side,” (2 Cor. 4:8); there was the sadness of his condition; “but not distressed,” there was his content in that condition: “we are perplexed,” there is his affliction; “but not in despair,” there is his contentation. And, if we read a little further, “in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults,” (2 Cor. 6:4, 5) &c. there is his trouble: and behold his content, “as having nothing, yet possessing all things.” When the apostle was driven out of all, yet in regard of that sweet contentment of mind which was like music in his soul, he possessed all. We read a short map or history of his sufferings; “in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft,” (2 Cor. 11:23, 24, 25) &c. yet behold the blessed frame and temper of his spirit, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Which way soever providence did blow, he had such heavenly skill and dexterity, that he knew how to steer his course. For his

outward estate he was indifferent; he could be either on the top of Jacob's ladder, or the bottom; he could sing either the dirge or the anthem; he could be anything that God would have him: "I know how to want, and how to abound." Here is a rare pattern for us to imitate. Paul, in regard of his faith and courage, was like a cedar, he could not be stirred; but for his outward condition, he was like a reed bending every way with the wind of providence. When a prosperous gale did blow upon him, he could bend with that, "I know how to be full;" and when a boisterous gust of affliction did blow, he could bend in humility with that, "I know how to be hungry." St Paul was, as Aristotle speaks, like a die that hath four squares; throw it which way you will, it falls upon a bottom: let God throw the apostle which way he would, he fell upon this bottom of contentment. A contented spirit is like a watch: though you carry it up and down with you yet the spring of it is not shaken, nor the wheels out of order, but the watch keeps its perfect motion: so it was with St Paul, though God carried him into various conditions, yet he was not lift up with the one, nor cast down with the other; the spring of his heart was not broken, the wheels of his affections were not disordered, but kept their constant motion towards heaven; still content. The ship that lies at anchor may sometimes be a little shaken, but never sinks; flesh and blood may have its fears and disquiets, but grace doth check them: a Christian, having cast anchor in heaven, his heart never sinks; a gracious spirit is a contented spirit. This is a rare art. Paul did not learn it at the feet of Gamaliel: "I am instructed," (Phil. 4:11); I am initiated into this holy mystery; as if he had said, I have gotten the divine art, I have the knack of it; God must make us right artists. If we should put some men to an art that they are not skilled in, how unfit would they be for it? put an husbandman to limning [Painting] or drawing pictures, what strange work would he make? this is out of his sphere. Take a limner that is exact in laying of colours, and put him to plough, or set him to planting, or grafting of trees, this is not his art, he is not skilled in it: bid a natural man live by faith, and when all things go cross, be contented, you bid him do what he hath no skill in, you may as well bid a child guide the stern of a ship; to live contented upon God in the deficiency of

outward comforts, is an art which “flesh and blood hath not learned;” nay, many of God’s own children, who excel in some duties of religion, when they come to this of contentment, how do they bungle? They have scarce commenced masters of this art.

CHAPTER V

The Resolving of Some Questions.

For the illustration of this doctrine, I shall propound these questions.

Question 1. *Whether a Christian may not be sensible of his condition, and yet be contented?*

Yes; for else he is not a saint, but a stoic. Rachel did well to weep for her children, there was nature; but her fault was, she refused to be comforted, there was discontent. Christ himself was sensible, when he sweat great drops of blood, and said, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;” yet he was contented, and sweetly submitted his will: “nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” The apostle bids us humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God,” (1 Pet. 5:6), which we cannot do unless we are sensible of it.

Question 2. *Whether a Christian may not lay open his grievances to God, and yet be contented?*

Yes: “unto thee have I opened my cause,” (Jer. 20:12); and David poured out his complaint before the Lord (Psa. 142:2). We may cry to God, and desire him to write down all our injuries: shall not the child complain to his father? When any burden is upon the spirit, prayer gives vent, it easeth the heart. Hannah’s spirit was burdened; “I am” says she, “a woman of a sorrowful spirit.” Now having prayed, and wept, she went away, and was no more sad; only here is the difference between a holy complaint and a discontented complaint; in the one we complain to God, in the other we complain of God.

Question 3. *What is it properly that contentment doth exclude?*

There are three things which contentment doth banish out of its diocese, and which can by no means consist with it.

1. It excludes a vexatious repining; this is properly the daughter

of discontent: “I mourn in my complaint,” (Psa. 55:2). He doth not say I murmur in my complaint. Murmuring is no better than mutiny in the heart; it is a rising up against God. When the sea is rough and unquiet, it casts forth nothing but foam: when the heart is discontented, it casts forth the foam of anger, impatience, and sometimes little better than blasphemy. Murmuring is nothing else but the scum which boils off from a discontented heart.

2. It excludes an uneven discomposure: when a man saith, I am in such straits, that I know not how to evolve or get out, I shall be undone; when his head and heart are so taken up, that he is not fit to pray or meditate, &c. he is not himself: just as when an army is routed, one man runs this way, and another that, the army is put into disorder; so a man’s thoughts run up and down distracted, discontent doth dislocate and unjoint the soul, it pulls off the wheels.

3. It excludes a childish despondency; and this is usually consequent upon the other. A man being in a hurry of mind, not knowing which way to extricate, or wind himself out of the present trouble, begins to faint and sink under it. For care is to the mind as a burden to the back; it loads the spirits, and with overloading, sinks them. A despondent spirit is a discontented spirit.

CHAPTER VI

Shewing the Nature of Contentment.

Having answered these questions, I shall in the next place, come to describe this contentment. It is a sweet temper of spirit, whereby a Christian carries himself in an equal poise in every condition. The nature of this will appear more clear in these three aphorisms.

1. *Contentment is a divine thing*; it becomes ours, not by acquisition, but infusion; it is a slip taken off from the tree of life, and planted by the Spirit of God in the soul; it is a fruit that grows not in the garden of philosophy, but is of an heavenly birth; it is therefore very observable that contentment is joined with godliness, and goes in equipage; “godliness with contentment is great gain,” (1 Tim. 6:6). Contentment being a consequent of godliness, or concomitant, or both, I call it divine, to

contradistinguish it to that of contentment, which a moral man may arrive at. Heathens have seemed to have this contentment, but it was only the shadow and picture of it; — the beryl, not the true diamond: theirs was but civil, this is sacred; theirs was only from principles of reason, this of religion; theirs was only lighted at nature's torch, this at the lamp of scripture. Reason may a little teach contentment, as thus: whatever my condition be, this is that I am born to; and if I meet with crosses, it is but catholic misery: all have their share, why therefore should I be troubled? Reason may suggest this; and indeed, this may be rather constraint; but to live securely and cheerfully upon God in the abatement of creature supplies, only religion can bring this into the soul's exchequer.

2. *Contentment is an intrinsic thing*; it lies within a man; not in the bark, but the root. Contentment hath both its fountain and stream in the soul. The beam hath not its light from the air; the beams of comfort which a contented man hath, do not arise from foreign comforts, but from within. As sorrow is seated in the spirit; "the heart knoweth its own bitterness," (Prov. 14:10): so contentment lies within the soul, and doth not depend upon externals. Hence I gather, that outward troubles cannot hinder this blessed contentment: it is a spiritual thing, and ariseth from spiritual grounds; the apprehension of God's love. When there is a tempest without, there may be music within; a bee may sting through the skin, but it cannot sting to the heart; outward afflictions cannot sting to a Christian's heart, where contentment lies. Thieves may plunder us of our money and plate, but not of this pearl of contentment, unless we are willing to part with it, for it is locked up in the cabinet of the heart; the soul which is possessed of this rich treasure of contentment, is like Noah in the ark, that can sing in the midst of a deluge.

3. *Contentment is an habitual thing*, it shines with a fixed light in the firmament of the soul. Contentment doth not appear only now and then, as some stars which are seen but seldom; it is a settled temper of the heart. One action doth not denominate; he is not said to be a liberal man, that gives alms once in his life; a covetous man may do so: but he is said to be liberal, that is, "given

to hospitality,” that is, who upon all occasions is willing to relieve the necessities of the poor: so he is said to be a contented man that is given to contentment. It is not casual but constant. Aristotle, in his rhetoric, distinguisheth between colours in the face that arise from passion, and those which arise from complexion; the pale face may look red when it blusheth, but this is only a passion; he is said properly to be ruddy and sanguine, who is constantly so, it is his complexion. He is not a contented man, who is so upon occasion, and perhaps when he is pleased: but who is so constantly, it is the habit and complexion in his soul.

CHAPTER VII

Reasons Pressing to Holy Contentment.

Having opened the nature of contentment, I come next to lay down some reasons or arguments to contentment, which may preponderate with us.

The first is, *God’s precept*. It is charged upon us as a duty: “be content with such things as you have,” (Heb. 13:5). The same God, who hath bid us believe, hath bid us be content: if we obey not, we run ourselves into a spiritual *premunire*. God’s word is a sufficient warrant; it hath authority in it, and must be a *supersedeas*, or sacred spell to discontent. *Ipsa dixit* was enough among Pythagoras’s scholars: “be it enacted,” is the royal style. God’s word must be the star that guides, and his will the weight that moves our obedience; his will is a law, and hath majesty enough in it to captivate us into obedience; our hearts must not be more unquiet than the raging sea, which at his word is stilled.

The second reason enforcing contentment, is, *God’s promise*: for he hath said “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” (Heb. 13:5). Here God hath engaged himself, under hand and seal for our necessary provisions. If a king should say to one of his subjects, I will take care of thee; as long as I have any crown-revenues, thou shalt be provided for; if thou art in danger, I will secure thee, — if in want, I will supply thee; would not that subject be content? Behold, God hath here made promise to the believer, and as it were entered into bond for his security, “I will never leave thee;” shall not this charm down the devil of discontent: “Leave thy fatherless

children with me, I will preserve them alive,” (Jer. 49:11). Methinks I see the godly man on his death-bed much discontented, and hear him complaining what will become of my wife and children when I am dead and gone? They may come to poverty: saith God, “trouble not thyself, be content, I will take care of thy children; and let thy widow trust in me.” God hath made a promise to us, that he will not leave us, and hath entailed the promise upon our wife and children; and will not this satisfy? True faith will take God’s single bond, without calling for witnesses.

Be content, by virtue of a decree. Whatever our condition be, God the umpire of the world hath from everlasting decreed that condition for us, and by his providence ordered all appurtenances thereunto. Let a Christian often think with himself, who hath placed me here, whether I am in a high sphere, or in a lower. Not chance or fortune, as the purblind heathens imagined; no, it is the wise God that hath by his providence fixed me in this orb. We must act that scene which God would have us; say not, such an one hath occasioned this to me; look not too much at the under-wheel. We read in Ezekiel, of a “wheel within a wheel,” (Ezek. 1:16). God’s decree is the cause of the turning of the wheels, and his providence is the inner-wheels that move all the rest. God’s providence is that helm which turns about the whole ship of the universe. Say then, as holy David, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou, Lord, didst it,” (Psa. 39:9). God’s providence, which is nothing else but the carrying on of his decree, should be a counterpoise against discontent; God hath set us in our station, and he hath done it in wisdom. We fancy such a condition of life is good for us; whereas if we were our own carvers, we should often cut the worst piece. Lot, being put to his choice did choose Sodom, which soon after was burned with fire. Rachel was very desirous of children, “give me children or I die,” and it cost her her life in bringing forth a child. Abraham was earnest for Ishmael, “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” but he had little comfort either of him or his seed; he was born a son of strife, his hand was against every man, and every man’s hand against him. The disciples wept for Christ’s leaving the world, they chose his corporeal presence: whereas it was best for them that Christ should

be gone, for else “the comforter would not come,” (John 16:7). David chose the life of his child, “he wept and fasted for it,” (2 Sam. 12:16); whereas if the child had lived, it would have been a perpetual monument of his shame. We stand oft in our own light; if we should sort, or parcel out our own comforts, we should hit upon the wrong. Is it not well for the child, that the parent doth choose for it? were it left to itself, it would perhaps choose a knife to cut its own finger. A man in a paroxysm calls for wine, which if he had, it were little better than poison; it is well for the patient, that he is at the physician’s appointment. The consideration of a decree determining, and a providence disposing of all things that fall out, should work our hearts to holy contentment. The wise God hath ordered our condition; if he sees it better for us to abound, we shall abound; if he sees it better for us to want, we shall want; be content to be at God’s disposal.

God sees, in his infinite wisdom, the same condition is not convenient for all; that which is good for one, may be bad for another; one season of weather will not serve all men’s occasions, one needs sunshine, another rain; one condition of life will not fit every man, no more than one suit of apparel will fit every body; prosperity is not fit for all, nor yet adversity. If one man be brought low, perhaps he can bear it better; he hath a greater stock of grace, more faith and patience; he can “gather grapes of thorns,” pick some comfort out of the cross: every one cannot do this. Another man is seated in an eminent place of dignity; he is fitter for it; perhaps it is a place that requires more parts of judgment, which every one is not capable of; perhaps he can use his estate better, he hath a public heart as well as a public place. The wise God sees that condition to be bad for one, which is good for another; hence it is he placeth men in different orbs and spheres; some higher, some lower. One man desires health, God sees sickness is better for him; God will work health out of sickness, by bringing the body of death, into a consumption. Another man desires liberty, God sees restraint better for him; he will work his liberty by restraint; when his feet are bound, his heart shall be most enlarged. Did we believe this, it would give a check to the sinful disputes and cavils of our hearts: shall I be discontented at that which is enacted by a decree,

and ordered by a providence? Is this to be a child or a rebel?

CHAPTER VIII

Use I. Shewing How a Christian May Make His Life Comfortable.

It shows how a Christian may come to lead a comfortable life, even an heaven upon earth, be the times what they will: by Christian contentment. The comfort of life doth not stand in having much; it is Christ's maxim, "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he doth possess," (Luke 12:15), but it is in being contented. Is not the bee as well contented with feeding on the dew, or sucking from a flower, as the ox that grazeth on the mountains? Contentment lies within a man, in the heart; and the way to be comfortable, is not by having our barns filled, but our minds quiet. The contented man, saith Seneca, is the happy man.

Discontent is a fretting humour, which dries the brains, wastes the spirits, corrodes and eats out the comfort of life; discontent makes a man that he doth not enjoy what he doth possess. A drop or two of vinegar will sour a whole glass of wine. Let a man have the affluence and confluence of worldly comforts, a drop or two of discontent will embitter and poison all.

Comfort depends upon contentment; Jacob went halting, when the sinew upon the hollow of his thigh shrank: so, when the sinew of contentment begins to shrink, we go halting in our comforts. Contentation is as necessary to keep the life comfortable, as oil is necessary to keep the lamp burning; the clouds of discontent do often drop the showers of tears.

Would we have comfort in our lives? we may have it if we will: a Christian may carve out what condition he will to himself. Why dost thou complain of thy troubles? it is not trouble that troubles, but discontent; it is not the water without the ship, but the water that gets within the leak, which drowns it; it is not outward affliction that can make the life of a Christian sad; a contented mind would sail above these waters, — but when there's a leak of discontent open, and trouble gets into the heart, then it is

disquieted and sinks. Do therefore as the mariners, pump the water out, and stop the spiritual leak in the soul, and no trouble can hurt thee.

CHAPTER IX

Use II. A Check to the Discontented Christian.

Here is a just reproof to such as are discontented with their condition. This disease is almost epidemical. Some not content with the calling which God hath set them in, must be a step higher, from the plough to the throne; who like the spider in the Proverbs, will “take hold with her hands, and is in kings’ palaces.” Others from the shop to the pulpit, (Num. 12:2); they would be in the temple of honour, before they are in the temple of virtue; who step into Moses’ chair, without Aaron’s bells and pomegranates; like apes, which do most shew their deformity when they are climbing. It is not enough that God hath bestowed gifts upon men, in private to edify; that he hath enriched them with many mercies? but, “seek ye the priesthood also?” (Num. 16:10). What is this but discontent arising from high flown pride? These do secretly tax the wisdom of God, that he hath not screwed them up in their condition a peg higher. Every man is complaining that his estate is no better, though he seldom complains that his heart is no better. One man commends this kind of life, another commends that; one man thinks a country-life best, another a city-life; the soldier thinks it best to be a merchant, and the merchant to be a soldier. Men can be content to be anything but what God would have them. How is it that no man is contented? Very few Christians have learned St Paul’s lesson: neither poor nor rich know how to be content, they can learn anything but this.

If men are *poor*, they learn to be *envious*; they malign those that are above them. Another’s prosperity is an eye-sore. When God’s candle shines upon their neighbour’s tabernacle, this light offends them. In the midst of wants, men can, in this sense, abound, namely, in envy and malice; an envious eye is an evil eye. They learn to be querulous, still complaining, as if God had dealt hardly with them; they are ever telling their wants, they want this and that

comfort, whereas their greatest want is a contented spirit. Those that are well enough content with their sin, yet are not content with their condition.

If men are *rich*, they learn to be *covetous*; thirsting insatiably after the world, and by unjust means scraping it together; their “right hand is full of bribes,” as the Psalmist expresseth it, (Psa. 26:10). Put a good cause in one scale, and a piece of gold in the other, and the gold weighs heaviest. There are, saith Solomon, four things that say, “it is not enough,” (Prov. 30:15): I may add a fifth; the heart of a covetous man. So that neither poor nor rich know how to be content. Never certainly since the creation did this sin of discontent reign or rather rage more than in our times; never was God more dishonoured; you can hardly speak with any, but the passion of his tongue betrays the discontent of his heart; every one lisps out his trouble, and here even the stammering tongue speaks too freely and fluently. If we have not what we desire, God shall not have a good look from us, but presently we are sick of discontent, and ready to die out of an humour. If God will not forgive the people of Israel for their lusts, they bid him take their lives; they must have quails to their manna. Ahab, though a king, and one would think his crown-lands had been sufficient for him, yet is sullen and discontented for Naboth’s vineyard. Jonah though a good man and a prophet, yet ready to die in a pet; and because God killed his gourd, kill me too, saith he. Rachel, “give me children, or I die;” she had many blessings, if she could have seen them, but wanted this contentation. God will supply our wants, but must he satisfy our lusts too? Many are discontented for a very trifle; another hath a better dress, a richer jewel, a newer fashion. Nero, not content with his empire, was troubled that the musician had more skill in playing than he. How fantastic are some that pine away in discontent for the want of those things which if they had, would but render them more ridiculous!

The first of four booklets.

