

THE ART OF DIVINE CONTENTMENT

**PART
TWO**



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The Art of Divine Contentment — Part Two

Thomas Watson

CHAPTER X

Use III. A Suasive to Contentment.

It exhorts us to labour for contentation; this is that which doth beautify and bespangle a Christian, and as a spiritual embroidery, doth set him off in the eyes of the world.

But methinks I hear some bitterly complaining, and saying to me, Alas! how is it possible to be contented? “The Lord hath made “my chain heavy;” he hath cast me into a very sad condition.”

There is no sin, but labours either to hide itself under some mask; or, if it cannot be concealed, then to vindicate itself by some apology. This sin of discontent I find very witty in its apologies, which I shall first discover, and then make a reply. We must lay it down as a rule, that discontent is a sin; so that all the pretences and apologies wherewith it labours to justify itself, are but the painting and dressing of a strumpet.

The first apology which discontent makes is this; **I have lost a child**. Paulina, upon the loss of her children, was so possessed with a spirit of sadness, that she had liked to have entombed herself in her own discontent; our love to relations is oftentimes more than our love to religion.

1. We must be content, not only when God gives mercies, but when He takes away. If we must “in every thing give thanks,” (1 Thess. 5:18), then in nothing be discontented.

2. Perhaps God hath taken away the cistern, that he may give you the more of the spring; he hath darkened the starlight, that you may have more sun-light. God intends you shall have more of himself, and is not he better than ten sons? Look not so much upon a temporal loss, as a spiritual gain; the comforts of the world run dregs; those which come out of the granary of the promise, are pure and sweet.

3. Your child was not given but lent: “I have, saith Hannah, lent my son to the Lord,” (1 Sam. 1:28); she lent him! the Lord hath lent him to her. Mercies are not entailed upon us, but lent; what a man lends he may call for again when he pleases. God hath put out a child to thee a while to nurse; wilt thou be displeased if he takes his child home again; O be not discontented that a mercy is taken away from you, but rather be thankful that it was lent you so long.

4. Suppose your child to be taken from you, either he was good or bad; if he was rebellious, you have not so much parted with a child, as a burden; you grieve for that which might have been a greater grief to you; if he was religious, then remember, he “is taken away from the evil to come,” and placed in his centre of felicity. This lower region is full of gross and hurtful vapours; how happy are those who are mounted into the celestial orbs! The righteous are *taken away*, in the original it is, *he is gathered*; a wicked child is cut off, but the pious child is gathered. Even as we see men gather flowers, and candy them, and preserve them by them, so hath God gathered thy child as a sweet flower that he may candy it with glory, and preserve it by him for ever. Why then should a Christian be discontented? why should he weep excessively? “Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me, but weep for yourselves,” (Luke 23:28); so, could we hear our children speaking to us out of heaven, they would say, weep not for us who are happy; we lie upon a soft pillow, even in the bosom of Christ; the Prince of Peace is embracing us and kissing us with the kisses of his lips; be not troubled at our preferment; “weep not for us,” but weep for yourselves, who are in a sinful sorrowful world: you are in the valley of tears, but we are on the mountain of spices; we have gotten to our harbour, but you are still tossing upon the waves of inconstancy. O Christian! be not discontented that thou hast parted with such a child; but rather rejoice that thou hadst such a child to part with. Break forth into thankfulness. What an honour is it to be a

parent to beget such a child, that while he lives increaseth the joy of the glorified angels, (Luke 20:10) and when he dies increaseth the number of the glorified saints.

5. If God hath taken away one of your children, he hath left you more, he might have stripped you of all. He took away Job's comforts, his estate, his children; and indeed his wife was left, but as a cross. Satan made a bow of this rib, as Chrysostom speaks, and shot a temptation by her at Job, thinking to have him shot to the heart; "curse God and die:" but Job had upon him the breast-plate of integrity; and though his children were taken away, yet not his graces; still he is content, still he blesseth God. O think how many mercies you still enjoy; yet your base hearts are more discontented at one loss, than thankful for an hundred mercies! God hath plucked one bunch of grapes from you; but how many precious clusters are left behind?

You may object, But it was my only child, — the staff of my age, — the seed of my comfort, — and the only blossom out of which my ancient family did grow.

6. God hath promised you, if you belong to him, "a name better than of sons and daughters" (Isa. 56:5). Is he dead that should have been the monument to have kept up the name of a family? God hath given you a new name, he hath written your name in the book of life; behold your spiritual heraldry; here is a name that can not be cut off. Hath God taken away thy only child? he hath given thee his only Son: this is a happy exchange. What needs he complain of losses, that hath Christ? He is his Father's brightness, (Heb. 1:3), his riches, (Col. 2:9), his delight (Psa. 42:1). Is there enough in Christ to delight the heart of God? and is there not enough in him to ravish us with holy delight? He is wisdom to teach us, righteousness to acquit us, sanctification to adorn us; he is that royal and princely gift, he is the bread of angels, the joy and triumph of saints; he is all in all, (Col. 3:10). Why then are thou discontented? Though thy child be lost, yet thou hast him for whom all things are loss.

7. Let us blush to think that nature should outstrip grace. Pulvillus, an heathen, when he was about to consecrate a temple to Jupiter, and news was brought him of the death of his son, would not desist from his enterprise, but with much composure of mind gave order for decent burial.

The second apology that discontent makes is, **I have a great part of my estate strangely melted away, and trading begins to fail.** God is pleased sometimes to bring his children very low, and cut them short in their estate; it fares with them as with that widow, who had nothing in her house, save a pot of oil, (2 Kings 4:2): but be content.

1. God hath taken away your estate, but not your portion. This is a sacred paradox, honour and estate are no part of a Christian's jointure; they are rather luxuries than essentials, and are extrinsical and foreign; therefore the loss of those cannot denominate a man miserable, still the portion remains; "the Lord is my portion, saith my soul," (Lam. 3:24). Suppose one were worth a million of money, and he should chance to lose a pin off his sleeve, this is no part of his estate, nor can we say he is undone; the loss of sublunary comforts is not so much to a Christian's portion, as the loss of a pin is to a million. "These things shall be added to you," (Matt. 6:33), they shall be cast in as overplus. When a man buys a piece of cloth he hath an inch or two given in to the measure; now, though he lose his inch of cloth, yet he is not undone, for still the whole piece remains: our outward estate is not so much in regard of the portion, as an inch of cloth is to the whole piece; why then should a Christian be discontented, when the title to his spiritual treasure remains? A thief may take away all the money that I have about me, but not my land; still a Christian hath a title to the land of promise. Mary hath chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her.

2. Perhaps, if thy estate had not been lost, thy soul had been lost; outward comforts do often quench inward heat. God can

bestow a jewel upon us, but we fall so in love with it, that we forget Him that gave it. What pity is it that we should commit idolatry with the creature! God is forced sometimes to drain away an estate: the plate and jewels are often cast over-board to save the passenger. Many a man may curse the time that ever he had such an estate: it hath been an enchantment to draw away his heart from God; “they that will be rich, fall into a snare:” are thou troubled that God hath prevented a snare? Riches are thorns, (Matt. 13:7); art thou angry because God hath pulled away a thorn from thee? Riches are compared to “thick clay,” (Hab. 2:6); perhaps thy affections, which are the feet of the soul, might have stuck so fast in this golden clay that they could not have ascended up to heaven. Be content; if God dam up our outward comforts, it is, that the stream of our love may run faster another way.

3. If your estate be small, yet God can bless a little. It is not how much money we have, but how much blessing. He that often curseth the bags of gold, can bless the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruise. What if thou hast not the full fleshpots? yet thou hast a promise, “I will abundantly bless her provision,” (Psa. 132:15), and then a little goes a great way. Be content thou hast the dew of a blessing distilled; a dinner of green herbs, where love is, is sweet; I may add, where the love of God is. Another may have more estate than you, but, more care; more riches, less rest; more revenues, but with all more occasions of expense; he hath a greater inheritance, yet perhaps God doth not give “him power to eat thereof,” (Eccl. 6:2), he hath the dominion of his estate, not the use; he holds more but enjoys less; in a word, thou hast less gold than he, perhaps less guilt.

4. You did never so thrive in your spiritual trade; your heart was never so low, as since your condition was low; you were never so poor in spirit, never so rich in faith. You did never run the ways of God’s commandments so fast as since some of your

golden weights were taken off. You never had such trading for heaven all your life; this is most abundant gain. You did never make such adventures upon the promise as since you left off your sea-adventures. This is the best kind of merchandize. O Christian, thou never hadst such incomes of the Spirit, such spring-tides of joy; and what though weak in estate, if strong in assurance? Be content: what you have lost one way, you have gained another.

5. Be your losses what they will in this kind, remember in every loss there is only a suffering, but in every discontent there is a sin, and one sin is worse than a thousand sufferings. What! because some of my revenues are gone, shall I part with some of my righteousness? shall my faith and patience go too? Because I do not possess an estate, shall I not therefore possess my own spirit? O learn to be content.

The third apology is, **it is sad with me in my relations:** where I should find most comfort, there I have most grief. This apology or objection brancheth itself into two particulars, whereto I shall give a distinct reply.

First. *My child goes on in rebellion;* I fear I have brought forth a child for the devil. It is indeed, sad to think, that hell should be paved with the skulls of any of our children; and certainly the pangs of grief which the mother hath in this kind, are worse than her pangs of travail; but though you ought to be humbled, yet not discontented; for, consider,

1. You may pick something out of your child's undutifulness; the child's sin is sometimes the parent's sermon; the undutifulness of children to us, may be a *memento* to put us in mind of our undutifulness once to God. Time was when we were rebellious children; how long did our heart stand out as garrisons against God? How long did he parley with us and beseech us, ere we would yield? He walked in the tenderness of his heart towards us, but we walked in the frowardness of our hearts

towards him; and since grace hath been planted in our souls, how much of the wild olive is still in us? How many motions of the Spirit do we daily resist? How many unkindnesses and affronts have we put upon Christ? Let this open a spring of repentance; look upon your child's rebellion and mourn for your own rebellion.

2. Though to see him undutiful is your grief, yet not always your sin. Hath a parent given the child, not only the milk of the breast, but "the sincere milk of the word?" hast thou seasoned his tender years with religious education? Thou canst do no more; parents can only work knowledge, God must work grace; they can only lay the wood together, it is God who must make it burn; a parent can only be a guide to show his child the way to heaven, the Spirit of God must be a loadstone to draw his heart into that way. "Am I in God's stead," saith Jacob, "who hath withheld the fruit of the womb," (Gen. 30:2)? Can I give children? So, is a parent in God's stead to give grace? who can help it, if a child having the light of conscience, Scripture, education, these three torches in his hand, yet runs wilfully into the deep ponds of sin? Weep for thy child, pray for him; but do not sin for him by discontent.

3. Say not, you have brought forth a child for the devil; God can reduce him; he hath promised "to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers," (Mal. 4:6) and "to open springs of grace in the desert," (Isa. 35:6). When thy child is going full sail to the devil, God can blow with a contrary wind of his Spirit and alter his course. When Paul was breathing out persecution against the saints, and was sailing hellward, God turns him another way; before he was going to Damascus, God sends him to Ananias; before a persecutor, now a preacher. Though our children are for the present fallen into the devil's pond, God can turn them from the power of Satan, and bring them in the twelfth hour. Monica was weeping for her son Augustine: at last God gave him in upon prayer, and he became a famous instrument in the church of God.

Second. The second branch of the objection is, but *my husband takes ill courses*; where I looked for honey, behold a sting.

It is sad to have the living and the dead tied together; yet, let not your heart fret with discontent; mourn for his sins, but do not murmur. For,

1. God hath placed you in your relation, and you cannot be discontented but you quarrel with God. What! for every cross that befalls us, shall we call the infinite wisdom of God into question? O the blasphemy of our hearts!

2. God can make you a gainer by your husband's sin; perhaps you had never been so good, if he had not been so bad. The fire burns hottest in the coldest climate. God often by a divine *antiperistasis* turns the sins of others to our good, and makes our maladies our medicines. The more profane the husband is, oft the more holy the wife grows; the more earthly he is, the more heavenly she grows; God makes sometimes the husband's sin a spur to the wife's grace. His exorbitances are as a pair of bellows to blow up the flame of her zeal and devotion the more. Is it not thus? Doth not thy husband's wickedness send thee to prayer? thou perhaps hadst never prayed so much, if he had not sinned so much. His deadness quickens thee the more, the stone of his heart is an hammer to break thy heart. The apostle saith, "the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband," (1 Cor. 7:14); but in this sense, the believing wife is sanctified by the unbelieving husband; she grows better, his sin is a whetstone to her grace, and a medicine for her security.

The fourth apology that discontent makes is, **but my friends have dealt very unkindly with me, and proved false.**

It is sad, when a friend proves like a brook in summer, (Job 6:15). The traveller being parched with heat, comes to the brook, hoping to refresh himself, but the brook is dried up, yet be content.

1. Thou art not alone, others of the saints have been betrayed

by friends; and when they have leaned upon them, they have been as a foot out of joint. This was true in the type David; “it was not an enemy that reproached me, but it was thou, O man, mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance; we took sweet counsel together, (Psa. 55:12, 13, 14): and in the antitype Christ; he was betrayed by a friend: and why should we think it strange to have the same measure dealt out to us as Jesus Christ had? “the servant is not above his master”.

2. A Christian may often read his sin in his punishment: hath not he dealt treacherously with God? How oft hath he grieved the Comforter, broken his vows, and through unbelief sided with Satan against God? how oft abused love, taken the jewels of God’s mercies, and made a golden calf of them, serving his own lusts? how oft made the free grace of God, which would have been a bolt to keep out sin, rather a key to open the door to it? These wounds hath the Lord received in the house of his friends. Look upon the unkindness of thy friend, and mourn for thy own unkindness against God; shall a Christian condemn that in another, which he hath been too guilty of himself?

3. Hath thy friend proved treacherous? perhaps you did repose too much confidence in him. If you lay more weight upon a house than the pillars will bear, it must needs break. God saith, “trust ye not in a friend,” (Mic. 7:5): perhaps you did put more trust in him, than you did dare to put in God. Friends are as Venice-glasses, we may use them, but if we lean too hard upon them, they will break; behold matter of humility, but not of sullenness and discontent.

4. You have a friend in heaven who will never fail you; “there is a friend” — saith Solomon — “that sticketh closer than a brother,” (Prov. 18:24): such a friend is God; he is very studious and inquisitive on our behalf; he hath a debating with himself, a consulting and projecting how he may do us good; he is the best friend which may give contentment in the midst of all

discourtesies of friends. Consider,

(1). He is a *loving* friend. “God is love,” (1 John 4:16); hence he is said sometimes to engrave us on the “palm of his hand,” (Isa. 49:16), that we may never be out of his eye; and to carry us in his bosom, (Isa. 40:11), near to his heart. There is no stop or stint in his love; but as the river Nilus, it overflows all the banks; his love is as far beyond our thoughts, as it is above our deserts. O the infinite love of God, in giving the Son of his love to be made flesh, which was more than if all the angels had been made worms! God in giving Christ to us gave his very heart to us: here is love pencilled out in all its glory, and engraven as with the “point of a diamond.” All other love is hatred in comparison of the love of our Friend.

(2). He is a *careful* friend: “He careth for you,” (1 Pet. 5:7). He minds and transacts our business as his own, he accounts his people’s interests and concernments as his interest. He provides for us, grace to enrich us, glory to ennoble us. It was David’s complaint, “no man careth for my soul,” (Psa. 142:4): a Christian hath a friend that cares for him.

(3). He is a *prudent* friend, (Dan. 2:20). A friend may sometimes err through ignorance or mistake, and give his friend poison instead of sugar; but “God is wise in heart, (Job 9:4); he is skilful as well as faithful; he knows what our disease is, and what physic is most proper to apply; he knows what will do us good, and what wind will be best to carry us to heaven.

(4). He is a *faithful* friend. And he is faithful in his promises; “in hope of eternal life which God that cannot lie hath promised,” (Tit. 1:2). God’s people are “children that will not lie,” (Isa. 63:8); but God is a God that cannot lie; he will not deceive the faith of his people; nay, he cannot: he is called “the Truth;” he can as well cease to be God as cease to be true. The Lord may sometimes change his promise, as when he converts a temporal promise into a spiritual; but he can never break his promise.

(5). He is a *compassionate* friend, hence in Scripture we read

of the yearning of his bowels, (Jer. 31:20). God's friendship is nothing else but compassion; for there is naturally no affection in us to desire his friendship, nor no goodness in us to deserve it; the loadstone is in himself. When we were full of blood, he was full of bowels; when we were enemies, he sent an embassy of peace; when our hearts were turned back from God, his heart was turned towards us. O the tenderness and sympathy of our Friend in heaven! We ourselves have some relentings of heart to those which are in misery; but it is God who begets all the mercies and bowels that are in us, therefore he is called "the Father of mercies," (2 Cor. 1:3).

(6). He is a *constant* friend: "his compassions fail not," (Lam. 3:22). Friends do often in adversity drop off as leaves in autumn; these are rather flatterers than friends. Joab was for a time faithful to king David's house; he went not after Absalom's treason; but within a while proved false to the crown, and went after the treason of Adonijah, (1 Kings 1:7). God is a friend for ever: "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end," (John 13:1). What though I am despised? yet God loves me. What though my friends cast me off? yet God loves me; he loves to the end, and there is no end of that love. This methinks, in case of discourtesies and unkindnesses, is enough to charm down discontent.

The fifth apology is, **I am under great reproaches.**

Let not this discontent: for,

1. It is a sign there is some good in thee; saith Socrates, what evil have I done, that this bad man commends me? The applause of the wicked usually denotes some evil, and their censure imports some good, (Psa. 38:20). David wept and fasted, and that was turned to his "reproach," (1 Pet. 4:14). As we must pass to heaven through the spikes of suffering, so through the clouds of reproach.

2. If your reproach be for God, as David's was, "for thy sake I

have born reproach, (Psa. 69:7); then it is rather matter of triumph, than dejection. Christ doth not say, when you are reproached be discontented; but rejoice: (Matt. 5:12) Wear your reproach as a diadem of honour, for now a spirit of “glory and of God rests upon you,” (1 Pet. 4:14). Put your reproaches into the inventory of your riches; so did Moses, (Heb. 11:26). It should be a Christian’s ambition to wear his Saviour’s livery, though it be sprinkled with blood and sullied with disgrace.

3. God will do us good by reproach: as David of Shimei’s cursing; “it may be the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day,” (2 Sam. 16:12). This puts us upon searching our sin: a child of God labours to read his sin in every stone of reproach that is cast at him; besides, now we have an opportunity to exercise patience and humility.

4. Jesus Christ was content to be reproached by us; he despised the shame of the cross, (Heb. 12:2). It may amaze us to think that he who was God could endure to be spit upon, to be crowned with thorns, in a kind of jeer; and when he was ready to bow his head upon the cross, to have the Jews in scorn, wag their heads and say, “he saved others, himself he cannot save.” The shame of the cross was as much as the blood of the cross; his name was crucified before his body. The sharp arrows of reproach that the world did shoot at Christ, went deeper into his heart than the spear; his suffering was so ignominious, that as if the sun did blush to behold, it withdrew its bright beams, and masked itself with a cloud; (and well it might when the Sun of Righteousness was in an eclipse;) all this contumely and reproach did the God of glory endure or rather despise for us. O then let us be content to have our names eclipsed for Christ; let not reproach lie at our heart, but let us bind it as a crown about our head! Alas, what is reproach? this is but small shot, how will men stand at the mouth of a cannon? These who are discontented at a reproach, will be offended at a faggot.

5. Is not many a man contented to suffer reproach for

maintaining his lust? and shall not we for maintaining the truth? Some glory in that which is their shame, (Phil. 3:19) and shall we be ashamed of that which is our glory? Be not troubled at these petty things. He whose heart is once divinely touched with the loadstone of God's Spirit, doth account it his honour to be dishonoured for Christ, (Acts 15:4), and doth as much despise the world's censure, as he doth their praise.

6. We live in an age wherein men dare reproach God himself. The divinity of the Son of God is blasphemously reproached by the Socinian; the blessed Bible is reproached by the Antiscripturist, as if it were but a legend of lies, and every man's faith a fable; the justice of God is called to the bar of reason by the Arminians; the wisdom of God in his providential actings, is taxed by the Atheist; the ordinances of God are decried by the Familists, as being too heavy a burden for a free-born conscience, and too low and carnal for a sublime seraphic spirit; the ways of God, which have the majesty of holiness shining in them, are calumniated by the profane; the mouths of men are open against God, as if he were an hard master, and the path of religion too strict and severe. If men can not give God a good word, shall we be discontented or troubled that they speak hardly of us? Such as labour to bury the glory of religion, shall we wonder that "their throats are open sepulchres," (Rom. 3:13), to bury our good name? O let us be contented, while we are in God's scouring-house, to have our names sullied a little; the blacker we seem to be here, the brighter shall we shine when God hath set us upon the celestial shelf.

The sixth apology that discontent makes is **disrespect in the world. I have not that esteem from men as is suitable to my quality and grace.**

And doth this trouble? Consider,

1. The world is an unequal judge; as it is full of change so of partiality. The world gives her respects, as she doth her places of

preferment; more by favour often, than desert. Hast thou the ground of real worth in thee; that is best worth that is in him that hath it; honour is in him that gives it; better deserve respect, and not have it, than have it and not deserve it.

2. Hast thou grace? God respects thee, and his judgment is best worth prizing. A believer is a person of honour, being born of God: since thou wast precious in mine eyes, “thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee,” (Isa. 43:4). Let the world think what they will of you; perhaps in their eyes you are a cast-away, in God’s eyes, a dove, (Cant. 2:14), a spouse, (Cant. 5:1), a jewel, (Mal. 3:17). Others account you the dregs and offscouring of the world, (1 Cor. 4:14), but God will give whole kingdoms for your ransom, (Isa. 43:3). Let this content: no matter with what oblique eyes I am looked upon in the world, if God thinks well of me. It is better that God approve, than man applaud. The world may put us in their rubric and God put us in his black book. What is a man the better that his fellow-prisoners commend him, if his judge condemn him? O labour to keep in with God; prize his love! Let my fellow-subjects frown, I am contented, being a favourite of the king of heaven.

3. If you are a child of God, you must look for disrespect. A believer is in the world, but not of the world; we are here in a pilgrim condition, out of our own country, therefore must not look for the respects and acclamations of the world; it is sufficient that we shall have honour in our own country, (Heb. 13:14). It is dangerous to be the world’s favourite.

4. Discontent arising from disrespect, savours too much of pride; an humble Christian hath a lower opinion of himself than others can have of him. He that is taken up about the thoughts of his sins, and how he hath provoked God, cries out, as Agur, “I am more brutish than any man,” (Prov. 30:2) and therefore is contented, though he be set among “the dogs of my flock,” (Job 30:1). Though he be low in the thoughts of others, yet he is

thankful that he is not laid in “the lowest hell,” (Psa. 86:13). A proud man sets an high value upon himself; and is angry with others, because they will not come up to his price: take heed of pride! O had others a window to look into their breast, as Crates once expressed it, or did thy heart stand where thy face doth, thou wouldst wonder to have so much respect.

The seventh apology is, **I meet with very great sufferings for the truth.**

Consider,

1. Your sufferings are not so great as your sins: put these two in the balance, and see which weighs heaviest; where sin lies heavy, sufferings lie light. A carnal spirit makes more of his sufferings, and less of his sins; he looks upon one at the great end of the perspective, but upon the other at the little end of the perspective. The carnal heart cries out, take away the frogs: but a gracious heart cries out, “take away the iniquity,” (2 Sam. 24:10). The one saith, never any one suffered as I have done; but the other saith, never one sinned as I have done, (Mic. 7:7).

2. Are thou under sufferings: thou hast an opportunity to show the valour and constancy of thy mind. Some of God’s saints would have accounted it a great favour to have been honoured with martyrdom. One said, “I am in prison till I be in prison.” Thou countest that a trouble, which others would have worn as an ensign of their glory.

3. Even those who have gone only upon moral principles, have shown much constancy and contentment in their sufferings. Curtius, being bravely mounted and in armour, threw himself into a great gulf, that the city of Rome might, according to the oracle, be delivered from the pestilence; and we, having a divine oracle, “that they who kill the body cannot hurt the soul,” shall we not with much constancy and patience devote ourselves to injuries for religion, and rather suffer for the truth than the truth

suffer for us? The Decii among the Romans, vowed themselves to death, that their legions and soldiers might be crowned with the honour of the victory. O what should we be content to suffer, to make the truth victorious! Regulus having sworn that he would return to Carthage, though he knew there was a furnace heating for him there, yet not daring to infringe his oath, he did adventure to go; we then who are Christians, having made a vow to Christ in baptism, and so often renewed in the blessed sacrament, should with much contentation rather choose to suffer, than violate our sacred oath. Thus the blessed martyrs, with what courage and cheerfulness did they yield up their souls to God? and when the fire was set to their bodies, yet their spirits were not at all fired with passion or discontent. Though others hurt the body, let them not the mind through discontent; show by your heroic courage, that you are above those troubles which you cannot be without.

The eighth apology is, **the prosperity of the wicked**. I confess it is so often, that the evil enjoy all the good, and the good endure all the evil, that David, though a good man, stumbled at this, and had like to have fallen, (Psa. 73:2).

Well, be contented; for remember,

1. These are not the only things, nor the best things; they are mercies without the pale; these are but acorns with which God feeds swine; ye who are believers have more choice fruit, the olive, the pomegranate, the fruit which grows on the true vine Jesus Christ; others have the fat of the earth, you have the dew of heaven; they have a south-land, you have those springs of living water which are clarified with Christ's blood, and indulcerated with his love.

2. To see the wicked flourish is matter rather of pity than envy; it is all the heaven they must have; "woe to you that are rich, for ye have received your consolation," (Luke 6:24). Hence it was that David made it his solemn prayer, "deliver me from the

wicked, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure, (Psa. 17:15). The word (methinks) are David's litany; from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, "good Lord, deliver me." When the wicked have eaten of their dainty dishes, there comes in a sad reckoning which will spoil all. The world is first musical and then tragical; if you would have a man fry and blaze in hell, let him have enough of the fat of the earth. O remember, for ever sand of mercy that runs out of the wicked, God puts a drop of wrath into his vial! Therefore as that soldier said to his fellow, "do you envy my grapes? they cost me dear, I must die for them;" so I say, do you envy the wicked? alas their prosperity is like Haman's banquet before execution. If a man were to be hanged, would one envy to see him walk to the gallows through pleasant fields and fine galleries, or to see him go up the ladder in clothes of gold? The wicked may flourish in their bravery a while; but, when they flourish as the grass, "it is, that they shall be destroyed for ever, (Psa. 92:7); the proud grass shall be mown down. Whatever a sinner enjoys, he hath a curse with it, (Mal. 2:2) and shall we envy? What if poisoned bread be given the dogs? The long furrows in the backs of the godly have a seed of blessing in them, when the table of the wicked becomes a snare, and their honour their halter.

The ninth apology that discontent makes for itself, is **the evils of the times**. The times are full of heresy and impiety, and this is that which troubles me. This apology consists of two branches, to which I shall answer *in specie*; and,

Branch 1. The times are full of *heresy*. This is indeed sad; when the devil cannot by violence destroy the church, he endeavours to poison it, when he cannot with Samson's foxtails set the corn on fire, then he sows tares; as he labours to destroy the peace of the church by vision, so the truth of it by error; we may cry out, we live in times wherein there is a sluice open to all novel opinions, and every man's opinion is his Bible. Well; this

may make us mourn, but let us not murmur through discontent: consider,

1. *Error makes a discovery of men.* Bad men; error discovers such as are tainted and corrupt. When the leprosy brake forth in the forehead, then was the leper discovered. Error is a spiritual bastard; the devil is the father, and pride the mother; you never knew an erroneous man but he was a proud man. Now, it is good that such men should be laid open, to the intent, first, that God's righteous judgment upon them may be adored; secondly, that others, who are free, be not infected. If a man have the plague, it is well it breaks forth; for my part, I would avoid an heretic, as I would avoid the devil, for he is sent on his errand. I appeal unto you; if there were a tavern in this city, where under a pretence of selling wine, many hogsheads of poison were to be sold, were it not well that others should know of it, that they might not buy? It is good that those that have poisoned opinions should be known, that the people of God may not come near either the scent or the taste of that poison. Error is a touch-stone to discover good men: it tries the gold: "there must be heresies, that they which are approved, may be made manifest," (1 Cor. 11:19). Thus our love to Christ, and zeal for truth doth appear. God shows who are the living fish; such as swim against the stream: who are the sound sheep; such as feed in the green pastures of the ordinances: who are the doves; such as live in the best air, where the spirit breathes: God sets a garland of honour upon these, "these are they which came out of great tribulation, (Rev. 7:14); so these are they that have opposed the errors of the times, these are they that have preserved the virginity of their conscience, who have kept their judgment sound and their heart soft. God will have a trophy of honour set upon some of his saints, they shall be renowned for their sincerity, being like the cypress, which keeps its greenness and freshness in the winter-season.

2. Be not sinfully discontented, for *God can make the errors of the church advantageous to truth.* Thus the truths of God have

come to be more beaten out and confirmed; as it is in the law, one may lay a false title to a piece of land, the true title hath by this means been the more searched into and ratified; some had never so studied to defend the truth by Scripture, if others had not endeavoured to overthrow it by sophistry; all the mists and fogs of error that have risen out of the bottomless pit, have made the glorious Sun of truth to shine so much the brighter. Had not Arius and Sabellius broached their damnable error, the truth of those questions about the blessed Trinity had never been so discussed and defended by Athanasius, Augustine, and others; had not the devil brought in so much of his princely darkness, the champions for truth had never run so fast to Scripture to light their lamps. So that God with a wheel within a wheel, over-rules these things wisely, and turns them to the best. Truth is a heavenly plant that settles by shaking.

3. *God raiseth the price of his truth the more;* the very shreds and filings of truth are venerable. When there is much counterfeit metal abroad, we prize the true gold the more; pure wine of truth is never more precious, than when unsound doctrines are broached and vented.

4. Error makes us more thankful to God for the jewel of truth. When you see another infected with the plague, how thankful are you that God hath freed you from the infection? When we see others have the leprosy in the head, how thankful are we to God that he hath not given us over to believe a lie and so be damned? It is a good use that may be made even of the error of the times when it makes us more humble and thankful, adoring the free grace of God, who hath kept us from drinking of that deadly poison.

Branch 2. The second branch of the apology that discontent makes, is the *impiety* of the times; I live and converse among the profane: “O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest,” (Psa. 55:6).

It is indeed sad, to be mixed with the wicked. David beheld “transgressors and was grieved:” and Lot (who was a bright star in a dark night) was vexed, or, as the word in the original may bear, wearied out with the unclean conversation of the wicked; he made the sins of Sodom spears to pierce his own soul. We ought, if there be any spark of divine love in us, to be very sensible of the sins of others, and to have our hearts bleed for them; yet let us not break forth into mourning and discontent, knowing that God in his providence hath permitted it, and surely not without some reasons; for,

First. The Lord makes the wicked an hedge to defend the godly; the wise God often makes those who are wicked and peaceable, a means to safeguard his people from those who are wicked and cruel. The king of Babylon kept Jeremiah, and gave special order for his looking to, that he did want nothing, (Jer. 39:11, 12). God sometimes makes brazen sinners to be brazen walls to defend his people.

Second. God doth but interline and mingle the wicked with the godly, that the godly may be a means to save the wicked; such is the beauty of holiness that it hath a magnetical force in it to allure and draw even the wicked. Sometimes God makes a believing husband a means to convert an unbelieving wife, and *contra*: “what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife, (1 Cor. 7:16)? The godly living among the wicked, by their prudent advice and pious example, have won them to the embracing of religion; if there were not some godly among the wicked, how in a probable way, without a miracle, can we imagine that the wicked should be converted? those who are now shining saints in heaven, sometimes served diverse lusts, (Tit. 3:3). Paul once a persecutor; Augustine once a manichee; Luther once a monk; but by the severe and holy carriage of the godly, were converted to the faith.

The tenth apology that discontent makes, is, **lowness of parts**

and gifts; I cannot (saith the Christian) discourse with that fluency, nor pray with that elegancy, as others.

1. Grace is beyond gifts; thou comparest thy grace with another's gifts, there is a vast difference; grace without gifts is infinitely better than gifts without grace. In religion, the vitals are best; gifts are a more extrinsical and common work of the Spirit, which is incident to reprobates; grace is a more distinguishing work, and is a jewel hung only upon the elect. Hast thou the seed of God, the holy anointing? be content.

(1). Thou sayest, Thou canst not discourse with that fluency as others. Experiments in religion are beyond notions, and impressions beyond expressions. Judas (no doubt) could make a learned discourse on Christ, but well-fared the woman in the gospel that felt virtue coming out of him, (Luke 8:47), a sanctified heart is better than a silver tongue. There is as much difference between gifts and graces, as between a tulip painted on the wall, and one growing in the garden.

(2). Thou sayest, thou canst not pray with that elegancy as others. Prayer is a matter more of the heart than the head. In prayer it is not so much fluency that prevails, as fervency, (Jam. 5:16), nor is God so much taken with the elegancy of speech, as the efficacy of the Spirit. Humility is better than volubility; here the mourner is the orator; sighs and groans are the best rhetoric.

2. Be not discontented, for God doth usually proportion a man's parts to the place to which he calls him; some are set in an higher sphere and function, their place requires more parts and abilities; but the most inferior member is useful in its place, and shall have a power delegated for the discharge of its peculiar office.

The eleventh apology is, **the troubles of the church.** Alas, my disquiet and discontent is not so much for myself, as the public! The church of God suffers.

I confess it is sad and we ought for this "to hang our harps

upon the willows.” He is a wooden leg in Christ’s body, that is not sensible of the state of the body. As a Christian must not be proud flesh, so neither dead flesh. When the church of God suffers, he must sympathise; Jeremiah wept for the virgin daughter of Sion. We must feel our brethren’s hard cords through our soft beds. In music, if one string be touched, all the rest sound: when God strikes upon our brethren, our “bowels must sound like an harp”. Be sensible, but give not way to discontent. For consider,

1. *God sits at the stern of his church*, (Psa. 46:5). Sometimes it is a ship tossed upon the waves, “afflicted and tossed!” (Isa. 54:11), but cannot God bring this ship to haven, though it meet with a storm upon the sea? This ship in the gospel was tossed because sin was in it; but it was not overwhelmed, because Christ was in it. Christ is in the ship of this church, fear not sinking; the church’s anchor is cast in heaven. Do not we think God loves his church, and takes as much care of it as we can? The names of the twelve tribes were on Aaron’s breast, signifying how near to God’s heart his people are; they are his portion, (Deut. 27:9) and shall that be lost? his glory, (Isa. 46:13) and shall that be finally eclipsed? No certainly. God can deliver his church, not only from, but by opposition; the church’s pangs shall help forward her deliverance.

2. *God hath always propagated religion by sufferings*. The foundation of the church hath been laid in blood, and these sanguine showers have ever made it more fruitful. Cain put the knife to Abel’s throat, and ever since the church’s veins had bled: but she is like the vine, which by bleeding grows, and like the palm-tree, which the more weight is laid upon it, the higher it riseth. The holiness and patience of the saints, under their persecutions, hath much added both to the growth of religion, and the crown. Basil and Tertullian observe of the primitive martyrs, that divers of the heathens seeing their zeal and constancy turned Christians: religion is that Phoenix which hath

always revived and flourished in the ashes of holy men. Isaiah sawn asunder, Peter crucified at Rome with his head downwards, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and Polycarp of Smyrna, both martyred for religion; yet evermore the truth hath been sealed by blood, and gloriously dispersed; whereupon Julian did forbear to persecute, not out of pity, but envy, because the church grew so fast, and multiplied, as Nazianzen well observes.

The twelfth apology that discontent makes for itself, is this, it is not my trouble that troubles me, **but it is my sins that do disquiet and discontent me.**

Be sure it be so; do not prevaricate with God and thy own soul; in true mourning for sin when the present suffering is removed, yet the sorrow is not removed. But suppose the apology be real, that sin is the ground of your discontent; yet I answer, a man's disquiet about sin may be beyond its bounds, in these three cases.

1. When it is *disheartening*, that is, when it sets up sin above mercy. If Israel had only pored upon their sting, and not looked up to the brazen serpent, they had never been healed. That sorrow for sin which drives us away from God, is not without sin, for there is more despair in it than remorse; the soul hath so many tears in its eyes, that it cannot see Christ. Sorrow, as sorrow, doth not save, that were to make Christ of our tears, but is useful, as it is preparatory in the soul, making sin vile, and Christ precious. O look up to the brazen serpent, the Lord Jesus! A sight of his blood will revive, the plaster of his merits is broader than our sore. It is Satan's policy, either to keep us from seeing our sins, or, if we will needs see them that we may be swallowed up of sorrow, (2 Cor. 2:7); either he would stupify us, or affright us; either keep the glass of the law from our eyes, or else pencil out our sins in such crimson colours, that we may sink in the quicksands of despair.

2. When sorrow is *indisposing*, it untunes the heart for prayer,

meditation, holy conference; it cloisters up the soul. This is not sorrow but rather sullenness, and doth render a man not so much penitential as cynical.

3. When it is *out of season*. God made us rejoice, and we hang up our harps upon the willows; he bids us trust and we cast ourselves down, and are brought even to the margin of despair. If Satan cannot keep us from mourning, he will be sure to put us upon it when it is least in season. When God calls us in a special manner to be thankful for mercy, and put on our white robes, Satan will be putting us into mourning, and instead of a garment of praise, clothe us with a spirit of heaviness; so God loseth the acknowledgement of mercy, and we the comfort. If thy sorrow hath turned and fitted thee for Christ, if it hath raised in thee high prizings of him, strong hungerings after him, sweet delight in him; this is as much as God requires, and a Christian doth but sin to vex and torture himself further upon the rack of his own discontent.

And thus I hope I have answered the most material objections and apologies which this sin of discontent doth make for itself. I see no reason why a Christian should be discontented, unless for his discontent. Let me, in the next place, propound something which may be both as a loadstone and a whet-stone to contentation.

The second of four booklets.

