

Monergism

The Art of
DIVINE CONTENTMENT

AN EXPOSITION OF PHILIPPIANS 4:11

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The Art of Divine Contentment

by Thomas Watson

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The Introduction to the Text.

"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me." Philippians 4:11-13

"Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward;" therefore we all need to learn the same lesson as Paul. "I have learned," he said "in whatever state I am, therewith to be content," Philippians 4:11. Believers, especially, wish to attain to a holy composure in their tribulations and under the stresses caused by our increasingly secular society.

These words are brought in 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 anxious for nothing."

Not to exclude: 1. A *prudential* care; for, he who provides not for his own house, "has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Ti. 5:8)

Nor, 2. a *religious* care; for we must give all "diligence to make our calling and election sure." (2 Pe. 1:10) But,

3. to exclude all anxious worry about the outcomes and events of things; "do not be anxious about your life—what you shall eat." (Mat. 6:25) And in this sense it should be a Christian's care not to be anxious. The in the Greek signifies "to cut the heart in pieces," a soul-dividing worry; take heed of this. We are bid to "commit our way unto the Lord;" (Psalm 37:5) the Hebrew word is, "roll your way upon the Lord." It is our work to cast away anxiety; (1 Pe 5:7) and it is God's work to take care.

By our immoderate worry, we take his work out of his hand. Worry, when it is extreme, either distrustful or distracting, is very dishonorable to God; it takes away his providence, as if he sat in heaven and did not mind the things here below; like a man who makes a clock, and then leaves it to run by itself. Immoderate worry takes the heart off from better things; and usually while we are thinking how we shall *live*—we forget how to *die*. Worry is a spiritual canker which wastes and dispirits; we may sooner by our worry add a furlong to our grief than a cubit to our comfort. God does threaten it as a curse, "they shall eat their bread with worry." (Ez. 12:1) Better to fast—than eat of that bread. "Be anxious for nothing."

Now, lest any one should say, "Yes, Paul you preach that to us which you have scarce learned yourself; have you learned not to be anxious?" The apostle seemed tacitly to answer that, in the words of the text; "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content," a speech worthy to be engraved upon our hearts, and to be written in letters of gold upon the crowns and diadems of princes.

The text does branch itself into these two general parts.

I. The scholar, Paul; "I have learned."

II. The lesson; "in every state to be content."

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

I begin with the first: The scholar, and his proficiency; "I have learned." Out of which I shall observe two things by way of explanation.

1. The apostle does 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 *cook*. Paul was a practitioner. Christians *hear* much—but it is to be feared, *learn* little. There were four kinds of soils in the parable, (Lu. 8:5) and but one good ground. This is 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 great 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, (Ac. 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 who has despises this mystery, will hardly ever learn to obey it. He who looks upon the things of heaven as unimportant things; 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 of things concerning his salvation. Who will learn that which he thinks is scarcely worth learning?

2. FORGETTING what we hear. If a scholar has his rules laid before him, and he forgets them as fast as he reads them, he will never learn. (Ja. 1:25) Aristotle calls the *memory* the scribe of the soul; and Bernard calls it the stomach of the soul, because it has a retentive faculty, and turns heavenly food into nutrition. 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*; his is to fill a precious cabinet of the mind, with dung. But as Hierom says, 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. Just 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, (says Christ) sink down into your ears;" (Lu. 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 in. 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 does 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 learners? How many sermons have you heard against **covetousness**, that it is the root, on which pride and idolatry grow? One calls it a metropolitan sin; it is a complex evil, it does 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, which cries, "give! give!" How much have you heard against rash **anger**, that is a temporary insanity; 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." (Mat. 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 colors with which Satan paints sin. While the swearer shoots his oaths, like flying arrows at God to pierce his glory—God shoots "a flying scroll" 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 down on you? Alas! how have they learned what sin is, who have not learned to leave sin! Does he know what a viper sin is—who will play with it?

2. You have heard much of CHRIST. Have you learned Christ? The Jews, as Jerome says, carried Christ in their *Bibles*—but not in their *heart*. The sound "went into all the earth; (Ro. 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*." (Ro. 10:16)

(1.) A man may **know** much of Christ—and yet not learn Christ. The devils knew Christ. (Mat. 1:24)

(2.) A man may **preach** Christ, and yet not learn Christ—as Judas and the false apostles. (Ph. 4:15)

(3.) A man may **profess** Christ, and yet not learn Christ. There are many professors in the world, who Christ will profess against. (Mat. 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 character of his holiness engraved 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 looking-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 has 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 a humble adherence say, "my Jesus;" do not be 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-lives, our lives like rich diamonds cast a sparkling luster 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.

The Second Branch of the Text.

This word, "I have learned," is a word which imports difficulty. It shows how hard the apostle came by contentment of mind; it was not bred in nature. 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—that **good things are hard to come by**. The business of true religion is not so easy as most imagine. "I have learned," says Paul. Indeed—you need not teach a man to sin; this is natural, (Psalm 58:3) and therefore easy. 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 piety must be learned. 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 exertion:

1. Because spiritual things are AGAINST nature. Everything in piety is opposite to nature. There are two things in true religion, 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. As for a man to deny his own wisdom, and see himself blind. As to have his own will, and have it melted into the will of God. As to be plucking out the right eye, beheading and crucifying that sin which is the favorite, and lies nearest to the heart. As for a man to be dead to the world, and in the midst of need to abound. As for him to take up the cross, and follow Christ, not only in golden—but in bloody paths. As to embrace religion, when it is dressed in rags, and all the jewels of honor and preferment are pulled off. All this is against nature—and therefore must be learned.

Likewise with self-examination; for a man to take his heart, as a watch, all in pieces; to set up a spiritual inquisition, and traverse things in his own soul; to take David's candle and lantern, (Psalm 119:105) and search for sin; nay, as judge, to pass the sentence upon himself! (2 Sa. 34:17) This is against nature, and will not easily be attained to without learning.

Likewise with self-reformation; to see a man, as Caleb, walking opposite to how he once walked, the current of his life altered, and running into the channel of piety—this is wholly against nature. When a stone ascends, it is not a natural motion—but a violent. Just so, 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 the world that are hard to find out, which are not learned without study. What then are *divine* things, which are in sphere above the world, and beyond all human learning? 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—

away from sense and reason. The angels in heaven are searching into these sacred depths. (1 Pe. 22)

USE. Let us beg the Spirit of God to teach us. We must be "divinely taught." God's Spirit must teach—or we cannot learn. "All your children shall be taught of the Lord". (Is. 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. Just so, we may read the Bible over—but we can not learn effectually, until the Spirit of God shines into our hearts. (2 Cor. 4:6) O implore this blessed Spirit! "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit." (Is. 48:17) Ministers may *tell* us our lesson, God alone can *teach* us.

We have lost both our *hearing* and *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. (Is. 35:5)

We are naturally *dead*. (Ep. 2:1) Who can 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 preached Word works so differently upon men. There are two men in one pew—the one is wrought upon effectually by the Spirit; the other lies at the ordinances as a dead child at the breast, and gets no nourishment. What is the reason for this? Because the heavenly gale of the Spirit blows upon the one, and not upon the other. One has the anointing of God, which teaches him all things (1 John 2:27) the other has 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, (Re. 14:2) reprobates could not sing it. Those who are skillful in the mysteries of salvation, must have the seal of the Spirit upon them. Let us make this our prayer: "Lord, breathe your Spirit into your Word!" We have a promise, which may add wings to prayer; "if you then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Lu. 11:13) And thus much of the first

part of the text, the scholar, which I intended only as a short summary.

The Lesson itself, with the Proposition.

I come to the second, which is the main thing—the lesson itself, "**in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.**" Here was a rare piece of learning indeed! The text has but few words in it; "in every state content:" but if that be true—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 until 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 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 the original state of innocency, how hard shall we find it, who are clogged with corruption!

2. It is of UNIVERSAL extent, it concerns all people.

1. It concerns RICH men. One would think it needless to press those to contentment whom God has 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 into a thousand. The drunkard—the more he drinks, the more he thirsts. Just so with covetousness. An earthly heart is like the grave, which is "never satisfied;" therefore I say to you, rich men—be content! Rich men are seldom content with their large *estates*; though they have estate enough, they have not *honor* 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." (Ac. 5:36) They never go so cheerfully as when the wind of honor and applause fills their sails; if this wind is low—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 honor, to be the second man in the kingdom; (Es. 3:1) yet in the midst of all his pomp, because Mordecai would not bow to him—he is discontented, and full of wrath, and there was no way to assuage this madness of revenge—but by spilling all the Jews' blood. The itch of *honor* 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 honor and magnificent titles—yet they have not always contentment in their *relations*. She who lies in the bosom, may sometimes blow the coals; as Job's wife, who would have him curse God himself; "curse God, and die!" Sometimes *children* cause discontent. **How often is it seen that the mother's milk, nourishes a viper!** He who once sucked her breast, goes about to suck her blood! Parents often gather thorns from grapes, and thistles from figs. Children are sweet-briar; like the rose, which is a fragrant flower—but has its *prickles*. Our

family comforts are not all *pure wine*—but *mixed*; they have in them more *dregs* than *spirits*. They are like that river which in the morning runs sweet—but in the evening runs bitter. We have no charter of exemption granted us in this life; therefore rich men had need be called upon to be content.

2. The doctrine of contentment concerns POOR men. You who suck so liberally from the breasts of providence—be content; it is an hard lesson, therefore it had need be learned very early. 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;" (Lu. 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 hard to be content when poverty has clipped our wings! But, though hard, "contentment in poverty" is an excellent virtue.

The apostle had "learned in *every* state to be content." God had brought Paul into as great variety of conditions as ever we read of any man—and yet he was content; else surely 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 contentment in that condition. "We are perplexed," there is his affliction; "but not in despair," there is his contentment. And, if we read a little further, "in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, etc." (2 Cor 6:4,5) there is his trouble. Behold his contentment, "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 often, etc." (2 Cor. 11:23, 24, 25) Yet behold the blessed frame and temper of his spirit, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content." Which ever way providence blew, Paul 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—or the bottom; he could sing either the dirge—or the anthem; he could be anything that God would have him to be. "I know what it is to be in need—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 blew upon him, he could bend with that, "I know how to be full;" and when a boisterous gust of affliction blew, he could bend in humility with that, "I know how to be hungry." Paul was like a dice—throw it which ever way you will—it always falls upon a bottom! Let God throw the apostle which ever 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 Paul—though God carried him into various conditions—yet he was not overly elated 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 which lies at *anchor* may sometimes be a little shaken—but never sinks; flesh and blood may have its fears and disquiets—but grace keeps them afloat. 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 have learned," (Ph. 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 a farmer to drawing pictures—what strange art work would he make? This is out of his

sphere. Take a great painter, 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! Just so, bid a natural man live by faith, and when all things go contrary, to be contented, you bid him do what he has no skill in, you may as well bid an infant to guide the stern of a ship! To live contented upon God in the deficiency of outward comforts, is an art which "flesh and blood has not learned;" nay, many of God's own children, who excel in some duties of religion, when they come to this art of contentment, how do they bungle! They have scarcely commenced the learning of this art.

The Resolving of Some Questions.

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

Question 1. Should a Christian be *insensible* to his condition?

No—for then 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 is possible, let this cup pass from me;" yet he was contented, and sweetly submitted his will: "nevertheless, not as I will—but as you will." The apostle bids us to humble ourselves "under the mighty hand of God," (1 Pe. 5:6) which we cannot do unless we are sensible of it.

Question 2. Whether a Christian may lay open his grievances to God.

Yes. "Unto you have I opened my cause;" (Jer. 20:12) and David poured out his complaint before the Lord. (Psalm 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 heart, prayer gives vent, it eases 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. 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 does contentment exclude?

There are three things which contentment banishes out of its diocese, and which can by no means dwell with it.

1. Contentment excludes a vexatious repining. *Murmuring* is properly the daughter of discontent. "I *mourn* in my complaint." (Psalm 55:2) He does 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. Just so, when the heart is discontented—it casts forth the foam of murmuring, anger, and impatience! *Murmuring* is nothing else, but the scum which boils off from a discontented heart!

2. Contentment excludes an uneven discomposure. When a man says, "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 distracted, that he is not fit to pray or meditate, etc. When 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 dislocates and unjoints the soul, it pulls off the wheels.

3. Contentment excludes a childish despondency. 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 worry 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.

Showing 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 as a gift from God. 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 human learning—but is of a heavenly birth. It is therefore very observable that contentment is joined with godliness, "godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Tim. 6:6) Contentment being an outgrowth of godliness, I call it divine, to distinguish it to that 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—not the true diamond. Theirs was but civil, this is sacred; theirs was only from principles of human 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 what I am born to; and if I meet with crosses, it is but the universal 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 piety can bring this into the soul's treasury.

2. Contentment is an INTERNAL thing. It lies within a man; not in the bark—but the root. Contentment has both its fountain and stream in the soul. The beams of comfort which a contented man has, do not arise from foreign comforts—but from within. As sorrow is seated in the spirit; "the heart knows its own bitterness;" (Proverbs 14:10) so contentment lies within the soul, and does not depend upon externals. Hence I gather, that *outward troubles cannot hinder this blessed contentment*. It is a spiritual thing, and arises 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 goods—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—it can sing in the midst of a deluge.

3. Contentment is an HABITUAL thing. It shines with a fixed light in the soul. Contentment does not appear only now and then, as some stars which are seen but seldom; it is a settled temper of the heart. One action does not denominate a person to be a contented person. One is not said to be a liberal man, who gives alms once in his life; a covetous man may do so. But he is said to be liberal, who is "given to hospitality," that is, who upon all occasions is willing to relieve the necessities of the poor. Just so, he is said to be a contented man, who is given to contentment. It is not *casual* but *constant*. Aristotle distinguishes between colors in the face that arise from *passion*, and those which arise from *complexion*. The pale face may look red when it blushes—but this is only a passion. He is said properly to be ruddy who is constantly so—it is his complexion. He is not a contented man, who is so upon some occasions, when things go well with him. A contented man, is so constantly—it is the habit and complexion in his soul.

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. Contentment is charged upon us as a duty, "be content with such things as you have." (Heb. 13:5) The same God, who has bid us *believe*, has bid us to be *content*. If we obey not, we run ourselves into sin. God's Word is a sufficient warrant; it has authority in it. God's Word must be the star which guides, and his will the weight that moves our obedience; his will is a law, and has 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 has said "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." (He. 13:5) Here God has 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 you; as long as I have any crown-revenues, you shall be provided for; if you are in danger—I will secure you; if in need—I will supply you. Would not that subject be content? Behold, God has here made promise to the believer, and as it were, entered into bond for his security, "I will never leave you;" shall not this charm away the *devil of discontent*? "Leave your 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 he is dead and gone. God says, "trouble not yourself, be content, I will take care of your children; and let your widow trust in me." God has made a promise to us, that he will not leave us, and has entailed the promise upon our wife and children; and will not this satisfy us? True faith will take God's single bond, without calling for witnesses.

Be content, by virtue of a decree. Whatever our condition is, God the umpire of the world, has from everlasting, decreed that condition for us, and by his providence ordered all details thereunto. Let a Christian often think with himself, "who has placed me here, whether I am in a high sphere, or in a lower. Not chance or fortune, as the blind heathens imagined. No! it is the wise God who has by his providence fixed me in this orb."

We must act that scene which God would have us. Say not, "such an one has occasioned this to me!" Look not too much at the under-wheel. We read in Ezekiel, of a "wheel within a wheel." (Ez. 1:16) God's decree is the cause of the turning of the wheels, and his providence is the inner-wheels which 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 silent, I opened not my mouth, because you, Lord, did it." (Psalm 39:9) God's *providence*, which is nothing else but the carrying on of his *decree*—should be a counterpoise against discontent. God has set us in our station, and he has done it in wisdom.

We imagine that such a condition of life is good for us; whereas if we were our own carvers, we would often cut the worst piece. Lot, being put to his choice, chose 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 you!" but he had little comfort either from 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 physical 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.

If we would be able to parcel out our own comforts, we would often parcel out that which is harmful to us. Is it not well for the *child*—that the *parent* should choose for it? were it left to itself, it would perhaps choose a knife to cut its own finger. 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, should work our hearts to holy contentment. The wise God has ordered our condition; if he sees it better for us to abound—we shall abound; if he sees it better for us to be in need—we shall be in need. Be content to be at God's disposal.

God sees, in his infinite wisdom, the same condition is not best 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 is adversity fit for all. If one man be brought low, perhaps he can bear it better; he has a greater stock of grace, more faith and patience; he can "gather grapes from thorns", pick some comfort out of the cross. Everyone cannot do this. Another man is seated in an eminent place of dignity; he is fitter for it; perhaps it is a place which requires more wisdom, which everyone is not capable of; perhaps he can use his estate better, he has 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, that he places men in different orbs and spheres; some higher, some lower. One man desires health, God sees sickness is better for him; God will work spiritual health out of physical sickness, by bringing the body of death, into a consumption. Another man desires liberty, God sees bondage to be better for him; he will work his liberty by bondage; 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 God's decree, and ordered by His wise providence?" Is this to be God' child—or a rebel?

Uses

Use I: Showing 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 does not consist in having much; it is Christ's maxim, "a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he does possess," (Lu. 12:15) but it is in being contented. Is not the *bee* as well contented with sucking from a flower—as the *ox* which grazes 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," says Seneca, "is the happy man."

Discontent is a fretting temper, which dries the brains, wastes the spirits, corrodes and eats out the comfort of life. Discontent makes a man not enjoy what he does possess. A drop or two of vinegar will sour a whole glass of wine. Just so, let a man have the affluence and all 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. Contentment is as necessary to keep the life comfortable, as oil is necessary to keep the lamp burning. The *clouds of discontent* 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 whatever condition he will to himself. Why do you complain of your troubles? it is not trouble which troubles—but discontentment. It is not outward affliction which can make the

life of a Christian sad; a contented mind would sail above these waters—but when discontent gets into the heart, then it is disquieted and sinks.

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 epidemic. Some not content with the calling which God has set them in, must be a step higher, from the plough to the throne; who like the spider in the Proverbs, will "be in kings' palaces." Others desire to go from the shop to the pulpit; (Nu. 12:2) they would be in the temple of *honor*, before they are in the temple of *virtue*. They are like apes, which most show their deformity when they are climbing. It is not enough that God has bestowed gifts upon men, in private to edify; that he has enriched them with many mercies—but must they "seek you the priesthood also?" (Nu. 16:10)

What is this but discontent arising from pride? These secretly tax the wisdom of God, that he has not made 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 desire to be anything but what God would have them. How is it that no man is contented? Very few Christians have learned 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 who are above them. Another's prosperity is an eye-sore. When God's candle shines upon their neighbor's tabernacle, this light offends them. In the midst of poverty, 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 needs, they lack this and that comfort, whereas their greatest need 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 expresses it. (Psalm 26:10) Put a good cause in one scale, and a piece of gold in the other, and the gold weighs heaviest. There are, says Solomon, four things that say, "it is not enough:" (Proverbs 30:15) I may add a fifth; the heart of a covetous man.

So we see 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 dishonored; you can hardly speak with any—but *the passion of his tongue betrays the discontent of his heart!* Everyone lisps out his discontent, 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 with discontent. 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 peeve; and because God killed his gourd. "Kill me too!" says he. Rachel complains, "give me children, or I die;" she had many blessings, if she could have seen them—but lacked this blessing of contentment.

God will supply our needs—but must he satisfy our lusts too! Many are discontented for lack of a trifle—another has 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

foolish are some, who pine away in discontent for the lack of those things which if they had, would but render them more sad!

Use III. A PERSUASIVE to contentment.

It exhorts us to labor for contentment—this is that which does beautify and bespangle a Christian, and as a spiritual embroidery, does 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 has made my chain heavy! He has cast me into a very sad condition."

There is no sin—but labors 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 unveil it—and then make a reply. We must lay it down as a rule, that *discontent is a sin*; so that all the pretenses and apologies with which it labors 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 should never be more than our love to true religion.

1. We must be content, not only when God gives mercies—but when He takes away. If we must "in everything give thanks," (1 Th. 5:18) then in nothing should we be discontented.

2. Perhaps God has taken away the *cistern*—that he may give you the more of the *spring*. Perhaps he has 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 upon a spiritual gain. The comforts of the world

run to 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, says Hannah, *lent* my son to the Lord;" (1 Sa. 1:28) she lent him! the Lord has lent him to her. Mercies are not *given* to us—but *lent*; what a man lends—he may take back again when he pleases. 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 pious, then remember, he "is taken away from the evil to come," and placed in his center of felicity. This lower region is full of vile and hurtful vapors; 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 preserve them—so has God gathered your child as a sweet flower that he may preserve it with glory, and preserve it by him forever.

Why then should a Christian be discontented? why should he weep excessively? "Daughters of Jerusalem weep not for me—but weep for yourselves!" (Lu. 23:28) Just 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! Don't be 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 harbor—but you are still tossing upon the waves of trouble"

O Christian! be not discontented that you have parted with such a child; but rather rejoice that you had such a child to part with. Break forth into thankfulness. What an honor is it to be a parent to beget

such a child, that while he lives increases the joy of the glorified angels, (Lu. 20:10) and when he dies increases the number of the glorified saints.

5. If God has taken away *one* of your children, he has left you more—he might have stripped you of *all*. He took away Job's comforts, his estate, his children! Indeed his wife was left—but as a cross. Satan made a bow of this rib, 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 blesses 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 has 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 old age—the seed of my comfort—and the only blossom out of which my ancient family did grow.

6. God has promised you, if you belong to him, "a name better than of sons and daughters." (Is. 56:5) Is he dead—who would have been the monument to have kept up the name of a family? God has given you a new name, he has written your name in the book of life! Behold your spiritual heraldry; here is a name which cannot be cut off.

Has God taken away your only child? he has given you his only Son! This is a happy exchange. What needs he complain of losses—who has Christ! He is his Father's brightness, (He. 1:3) his riches, (Col. 2:9) his delight. (Psalm 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 you discontented? Though your *child* is lost—yet you have *him* for whom all things are loss.

7. Let us blush to think that *nature* should outstrip *grace*. Pulvillus, a 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, went through with the burial.

The second apology which discontent makes is, "**I have a great part of my estate suddenly melted away!**" 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, but a pot of oil. (2 Ki. 4:2) But be content.

1. God has taken away your *estate*—but not your eternal *portion*. This is a sacred paradox, honor and estate are no part of a Christian's portion; they are rather *luxuries* than *essentials*, and therefore the loss of those cannot denominate a man miserable. Still the portion remains; "the *Lord* is my portion, says my soul." (Lam. 3:24) Suppose one were worth millions, 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. Just so, 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," (Mat. 6:33) they shall be cast in as overplus. When a man buys a piece of cloth he has 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. Just so, 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—but not my land. Just so, a Christian has a title to the land of promise. Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken from her.

2. Perhaps, if your estate had not been lost—your soul had been lost; outward comforts do often quench inward spiritual heat. God can bestow a jewel upon us—but we fall so in love with it, that we forget Him who 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 has been an enchantment to draw away his heart from God; "those who will be rich, fall into a *snare*." Are you troubled that God has prevented a snare? Riches are thorns; (Mat. 13:7) are you angry because God has pulled away a thorn from you? Riches are compared to "thick clay;" (Ha. 2:6) perhaps your 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 dams up our outward comforts—it is that the stream of our love may run faster to Him!

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 who often curses the bags of gold, can bless the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruise. What if you have not the full fleshpots? yet you have a promise, "I will abundantly bless your provision," (Psalm 132:15) and then a *little* goes a *long* way. Be content you have 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 worry; more riches—but less rest; more revenues—but more occasions of expense; he has a greater inheritance—yet perhaps "God gives a man riches, wealth, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all he desires for himself, but God does not allow him to enjoy them" (Ecc. 6:2) he has the dominion of his estate, not the use; he holds more—but enjoys less. In a word, you has less *gold* than he, perhaps less *guilt*.

4. You did never so thrive in your spiritual trade; your heart was never so low—as when 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 when 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 when you left off your sea-adventures. This is the best kind of merchandise. O Christian, you never had 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 holiness? 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 branches itself into two particulars, whereto I shall give a distinct reply.

1st. 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 has 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, before we would yield? He walked in the tenderness of his heart towards us—but we

walked in the stubbornness of our hearts towards him; and since grace has 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. Has a parent given the child, not only the milk of the breast—but "the sincere milk of the Word?" have you seasoned his tender years with pious education? You can 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," says Jacob, "who has withheld the fruit of the womb?" (Ge. 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 willfully into the deep ponds of sin? *Weep* for your 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 reform him; he has promised "to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6) and "to open springs of grace in the desert." (Is. 35:6) When your 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 home the twelfth hour. Monica was weeping for her son Augustine: at last God saved him, and he became a famous instrument in the church of God.

2. 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 has placed you in your relation, and if you are discontented, 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 would have never been so good—if he had not been so bad. The fire burns *hottest* in the *coldest* climate. God often by a divine chemistry, turns the sins of others to our good—and makes our *maladies* into our *medicines*. The more profane the husband is, often 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 exorbitance is often a bellows to blow up the flame of her zeal and devotion the more. Is it not thus? Does not your husband's wickedness send you to prayer? you perhaps would have never prayed so much—if he had not sinned so much. His deadness quickens you the more—the stone of his heart is an hammer to break your heart. The apostle says, "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 soul.

The next apology that discontent makes is—"**But my FRIENDS have dealt very unkindly with me, and turned against me.**"

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

1. You are not alone, other 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 you, O man, my equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance; we took sweet counsel together: (Psalm 55:12, 13, 14) and in the antitype Christ; he was betrayed by a friend. So 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: has not he dealt treacherously with God? How often has he grieved the Comforter, broken his vows, and through unbelief sided with Satan against God! How often has he abused God's love, taken the jewels of God's mercies, and made a golden calf of them—serving his own lusts! How often has he made the free grace of God, which should have been a bolt to keep out sin, rather a key to open the door to it! These wounds has the Lord received in the house of his *friends*. Look upon the unkindness of your friend—and mourn for your own unkindness against God! Shall a Christian condemn that in another, which he has been too guilty of himself?

3. Has your 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 says, "trust not in a friend:" (Mi. 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" says Solomon "who sticks closer than a brother!" (Proverbs 18:24) such a friend is God; he is very studious and inquisitive on our behalf; he has a debating with himself, a consulting and projecting how he may do us good; he is the best

friend, who gives 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," (Is. 49:16) that we may never be out of his eye. He carries us in his bosom, (Is. 40:11) near to his heart. There is no interruption or stint in his love; but as the Nile river, 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 penciled out in all its glory, and engraved as with the "point of a diamond." All other love is hatred—in comparison of the love of our Friend.

(2.) He is a **caring** friend: "He cares for you!" (1 Pe. 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—and *glory* to ennoble us. It was David's complaint, "no man cares for my soul!" (Psalm 142:4) a Christian has a friend who cares for him.

(3.) He is a **wise** friend. (Da. 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 skillful as well as faithful; he knows what our disease is, and what remedy 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. He is faithful in his *promises*; "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, has promised." (Titus 1:2) God cannot lie; he will not deceive 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 promise; but he can never *break* his promise.

(5.) He is a **compassionate** friend, hence in Scripture we read of the yearning of his affections. (Jer. 31:20) God's friendship is nothing else but compassion; for there is naturally no affection in us to *desire* his friendship, nor any goodness in us to *deserve* it; the loadstone is in himself. When we were full of sin—he was full of love; when we were enemies—he sent an embassy of peace; when our hearts were turned away 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 affections 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." (La. 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; but within a while proved false to the crown, and went after the treason of Adonijah. (1 Ki. 1:7) God is a friend forever: "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 next apology is, "**I am under great REPROACHES!**" Let not this discontent you, for,

1. It is a sign there is some good in you. The *applause* of the wicked, usually denotes some evil in us—and their *censure* usually imports some good in us. (Psalm 38:20) David wept and fasted, and that was turned to his "reproach". (Pe. 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 *your* sake I have born reproach;" (Psalm 69:7) then it is rather matter of *triumph*, than dejection. Christ does not say, when you are reproached be

discontented; but *rejoice!* (Mat. 5:12) Wear your reproach as a diadem of honor, for now a spirit of "glory and of God rests upon you." (1 Pe. 4:14) Put your reproaches into the inventory of your *riches*—as Moses did. (He. 11:26) It should be a Christian's ambition to wear his Savior's livery, though it is sprinkled with blood and sullied with disgrace!

3. God will do us good by reproach: as David of Shimei's cursing; "it may be, that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." (2 Sa. 16:12) This puts us upon searching our sin: a child of God labors to read his *sin*—in every *stone* of reproach which 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 "endured the cross, scorning its shame." (He. 12:2) It may amaze us to think that he who was God, could endure to be spit upon, and be crowned with thorns; 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* which the world shot at Christ, went deeper into his heart, than the spear! His suffering was so ignominious, that the sun blushed to behold it. 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 revilement and reproach, did the God of glory endure 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! These who are discontented at a *reproach*, will avoid any *persecution* for Christ.

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, (Ph. 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, does account it his honor—to be dishonored for Christ, (Ac. 15:4) and does as much despise the world's censure, as he does 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 true religion, too strict and severe. If men cannot give *God* a good word, shall we be discontented or troubled that they speak hardly of *us*? Such as labor to bury the glory of *true religion*, shall we wonder that "their throats are open sepulchers," (Ro. 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 has set us upon the celestial shelf!

The sixth apology that discontent makes, is *disrespect*. "**I have not that esteem from men, as is suitable to my worth and grace!**" And does this trouble you? Consider,

1. The world is an unequal judge; as it is full of *change*—as of *partiality*. The world gives her respects, as she does her places of preferment; more often by favor, than desert. Have you real worth in you? It is better to *deserve* respect—and not have it; than have it—and not deserve it!

2. Have you grace? God respects you, and *his* judgment is most worth prizing. A believer is a person of honor, being born of God: "Since you were precious in my eyes, you have been honorable, and I have loved you." (Is. 43:4) Let the world think what they will of you; perhaps in their eyes, you are vile; but in God's eyes, you are his dove, (Ca. 2:14) his spouse, (Ca. 5:1) his jewel. (Mal. 3:17) Others account you the dregs of offscouring of the world, (1 Cor. 4:14) but God will give whole kingdoms for your ransom. (Is. 43:3) Let this content—it does not matter how I am looked upon in the world—if God thinks well of me. It is better that God approves—than man applauds. The world may honor us—and God put us in his black book! What is a man the better that his fellow-prisoners commend him—if his judge condemns him! O labor to keep in with God; prize his love! Let worldlings frown on me—I am contented, being a favorite of the king of heaven!

3. If you are a child of God, you must expect disrespect from the ungodly. 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 respect and acclamation of the world. It is sufficient that we shall have honor in our own country. (He. 13:14) *It is dangerous to be the world's favorite!*

4. Discontent arising from disrespect, savors too much of pride. A humble Christian has a lower opinion of himself—than others can have of him. He who is taken up about the thoughts of his sins, and how he has provoked God, cries out, as Agur, "I am more brutish than any man!" (Proverbs 30:2) and therefore is contented, though he be set among "the *dogs* of my flock." (Job 30:1) Though he is low in the thoughts of the ungodly—yet he is thankful that he is not laid in "the lowest hell." (Psalm 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 heart, or did your heart stand where your face does—you would wonder to have so *much* respect!

The next 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 telescope—but upon the other at the little end of the telescope. The carnal heart cries out, "Take away my *affliction!*" But a gracious heart cries out, "Take away my *iniquity!*" (2 Sa. 24:10) The one says, "Never has anyone *suffered* as I have done!" But the other says, "Never has anyone *sinned* as I have done!" (Mi. 7:7)

2. Are you under sufferings: you have an opportunity to show the valor and constancy of your mind. Some of God's saints would have accounted it a great favor, to have been honored with martyrdom. One said, "I am in prison—until I be in prison". You count 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 armor, 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, "those who kill the body, cannot hurt the soul," shall we not with much constancy and patience devote ourselves to injuries for Christ, 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 honor 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 contentment

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! 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 be discontent; show by your heroic courage, that you are *above* those troubles, which you cannot be *without*.

The next apology is, "**the prosperity of the wicked.**" "I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked!" Psalm 73:3 It is often that the *evil* enjoy all the good—and the *good* endure all the evil. David, though a godly man, stumbled at this, and had almost stumbled because of this. Well, be contented; for remember,

1. Worldly goods are not the *only* things, nor the *best* things; they are mere temporal blessings. These are but the *acorns* with which God feeds swine! You 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 muddied puddles—but you have those springs of living water which are purified with Christ's blood, and filled with his love.

2. To see the wicked flourish is rather a matter of *pity*, than *envy*! This is all the heaven they will have! "Woe to you who are rich, for you have your only happiness now!" (Luke 6:24) Hence it was, that David made it his solemn prayer, "Deliver me from the wicked, from men of the world, who have their portion in this life!" (Psalm 17:15) These words are David's litany—"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! We should not envy a man who will fry and blaze in hell—let him have enough of the fat of the earth. O remember—for every *sand of mercy* which runs out of the wicked, God puts a *drop of wrath* into his vial! "You are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment is revealed." Romans 2:5

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 for a while; but, when they flourish as the grass, "it is, that they shall be destroyed forever; (Psalm 92:7) the proud grass shall be mown down. Whatever a sinner enjoys—he has a curse with it, "I will curse your blessings!" (Malachi 2:2) And shall we envy him? Would we envy a dog--if poisoned food was given to it! 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 honor their halter!

The next 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! Error is a touch-stone to discover bad men. This is indeed sad; when the devil cannot destroy the church by *violence*—he endeavors to *poison* it; when he cannot with Samson's foxtails set the corn on fire, then he sows *tares*. As he labors to destroy the *peace* of the church by division, 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 or be discontent. Consider,

1. Error makes a discovery of men. Error reveals 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 unveiled, to the intent, first, that God's righteous judgment upon

them may be adored; secondly, that others be not infected. If a man has the plague, it is well it breaks forth. For my part, I would avoid a heretic, as I would avoid the devil, for he is sent on the devil's errand. I appeal unto you; if there were a tavern in this city, where under a pretense of selling wine, many bottles 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 those who are approved, may be made manifest." (1 Cor. 11:19) Thus our love to Christ, and zeal for truth does 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 honor upon these, "these are those who came out of great tribulation; (Re. 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 honor 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 has 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 endeavored 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 would never have 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—which settles by *shaking*.

3. God raises the price of his truth the more; the very shreds and filings of truth are esteemed. 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 has freed you from the infection! When we see others have the *leprosy in the head*—how thankful are we to God that he has 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 has kept us from drinking of that deadly poison!

Branch 2. The times are full of IMPIETY! 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." (Psalm 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 filthy lives of the wicked; he made the sins of Sodom, into spears to pierce his own soul. We ought, if there is 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 has permitted it, and surely not without some reasons; for,

1st. The Lord makes the wicked a 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 after, that he did lack nothing. (Jer. 39:11,12) God sometimes makes brazen sinners to be brazen walls to defend his people.

2nd. God does 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 has a magnetic force in it to allure and draw even the wicked. Sometimes God makes a believing husband a means to convert an unbelieving wife, and vice versa: "How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your 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 true religion. If there were not some godly among the wicked, how in a practical way, without a miracle, can we imagine that the wicked should be converted? those who are now shining saints in heaven, once served diverse lusts. (Ti. 3:3) Paul was once a persecutor; Augustine was once a manichee; Luther was once a monk; but by the kind and holy behavior of the godly, were converted to the faith.

The next apology that discontent makes, is, **smallness of abilities and gifts.** "I cannot (says the Christian) discourse with that fluency, nor pray with that elegance, as others."

1. Grace is beyond gifts; you compare your 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 extrinsic 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. Have you the seed of God—the holy anointing? Be content!

(1.) You say, You can not **discourse** with that fluency as others. *Experience* in religion, is better than *notions*; and heart impressions are beyond vocal expressions. Judas (no doubt) could make a learned discourse on Christ—but well-fared the woman in the gospel, who felt virtue coming out of Christ, (Lu. 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.) You say, you can not **pray** with that elegance as others. Prayer is a matter more of the heart—than the head. In prayer it is not so much *fluency* which prevails—as *fergency*, (Ja. 5:16) nor is God so much taken with the *elegance* of speech, as the *efficacy* of the Spirit. *Humility* is better than *fluency*; here the *mourner* is the orator; *sighs and groans are the best rhetoric!*

2. Be contented, for God does usually proportion a man's abilities to the place to which he calls him; some are set in a higher sphere and function, their place requires more gifts 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 next apology is, **the troubles of the church.** "Alas, my disquiet and discontent is not so much for myself, as the church! 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 sympathize; Jeremiah *wept* for the virgin daughter of Zion. We must feel our brethren's hard cords, through our soft beds. In music, if one string is touched, all the rest sound: when God strikes upon our brethren, our "affections must sound like a harp". Be sensible—but give not way to discontent. For consider,

1. God sits at the stern of his church. (Psalm 46:5) Sometimes it is a ship tossed upon the waves, "afflicted and tossed! (Is. 54:11) but cannot God bring this ship to *haven*, though it meets 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. God loves his church, and takes much care of it. The names of the twelve tribes were on Aaron's breastplate, signifying how near to God's heart his people are. They are his *portion*, (De. 27:9) and shall that be lost? They are his glory, (Is. 46:13) and shall that be finally eclipsed? Certainly not! God can deliver his church, not only *from* opposition—but *by* opposition; the church's pangs shall help forward her deliverance.

2. God has always propagated true religion by sufferings. The foundation of the church has 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 rises. The holiness and patience of the saints, under their persecutions, has much added both to the growth of true religion, and the glory of God. Basil and Tertullian observe of the primitive martyrs, that many of the heathen, seeing their zeal and constancy, turned Christians. Religion is that Phoenix which has always revived and flourished in the ashes of holy men. Isaiah sawn asunder, Peter crucified at Rome with his head upside down, Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and Polycarp of Smyrna, were both martyred for true religion—yet evermore the truth has 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 afflictions which trouble me—but it is my SINS which disquiet and discontent me.**"

Be sure it is so; do not prevaricate with God and your own soul; in true mourning for sin when the present *suffering* is removed—yet the *sorrow* is not removed. But suppose the apology is 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 over their sting, and not looked up to the brazen serpent—they would never have been healed. That sorrow for sin which drives us away from God, is sinful—for there is more *despair* in it than *remorse*; the soul has so many *tears* in its eyes, that it cannot see Christ! Sorrow, as sorrow, does not save, that were to make a 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 do see them—that we may be swallowed up with sorrow; (2 Cor. 2:7). Either he would *stupify* us, or *affright* us; either keep the looking-glass of the law from our eyes, or else pencil out our sins in such crimson colors, 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 renders 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 loses the acknowledgment of mercy—and we the comfort. If your sorrow has turned and fitted you

for Christ, if it has raised in you high prizings of him, strong hungerings after him, sweet delight in him—this is as much as God requires. A Christian does 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 does 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 contentment.

Divine Motives to Contentment.

I. Consider the EXCELLENCY of contentment. Contentment is a flower which does not grow in every garden. You would think it were excellent if I could prescribe a remedy or antidote against poverty. Behold, here is that which is more excellent, for a man to be poor—and yet have enough! Contentment teaches a man how to abound—in the midst of poverty. Contentment is a remedy against all our trouble, an alleviation to all our burdens, the cure of to every worry. Contentment, though it be not properly a grace (it is rather a disposition of mind,) yet in it there is a happy mixture of all the graces: it is a most precious compound, which is made up of faith, patience, meekness, humility, etc. which are the ingredients put into it. Now there are these seven rare excellencies in contentment.

First excellency. A contented Christian carries heaven with him. For, what is heaven—but that sweet repose and full contentment that the soul shall have in God. In contentment there are the first-fruits of heaven. There are two things in a contented spirit, which make it like heaven.

(1.) **God** is there; something of God is to be seen in that heart. A discontented Christian is like a rough tempestuous sea; when the water is rough you can see nothing there; but when it is smooth and serene, then you may behold your face in the water. (Proverbs 27:19) When the heart rages through discontent, it is like a rough sea, you can see nothing there, unless it is passion and murmuring; there is nothing of God, nothing of heaven in that heart! But by virtue of contentment, the heart becomes like the sea when it is smooth and calm, there is a face shining there; you may see something of Christ in that heart, a representation of all the graces.

(2.) **Rest** and **peace** are there. O what a peace is kept in a contented heart! What a heaven! A contented Christian, is like Noah in the ark; though the ark was tossed with waves, Noah could sit and sing in the ark. The soul that is gotten into the ark of contentment, sits quiet, and sails above all the waves of trouble; he can sing in this spiritual ark. The wheels of the chariot move—but the axle stirs not; the circumference of the heavens is carried about the earth—but the earth moves not out of its center. When we meet with motion and change in the creatures round about us, a contented spirit is not stirred nor moved out of its center. The sails of a mill move with the wind—but the mill itself stands still, an emblem of contentment; when our outward estate moves with the wind of providence—yet the heart is settled through holy contentment; and when others are shaking and trembling in times of trouble, the contented spirit can say, as David, "O God my heart is fixed!" (Psalm 57:7) What is this, but a piece of heaven?

Second excellency. Whatever is defective in the creature, is made up in contentment. A Christian may lack the comforts that others have—the land, and possessions; but God has instilled into his heart that contentment which is far better: in this sense that saying of our Savior is true, "he shall receive a hundred fold." (Mat. 19:29) Perhaps he who ventured all for Christ, never has his house or land again: yes—but God gives him a contented spirit, and this breeds

such joy in the soul, as is infinitely sweeter than all his houses and lands which he left for Christ.

It was sad with David in regard of his outward comforts, he being driven from his kingdom; yet in regard of that sweet contentment he found in God, he had more comfort than men have in the time of harvest and vintage. (Psalm 4:7) One man has house and lands to live upon, another has nothing, only a small trade; yet even that brings in a livelihood. A Christian may have little in the world—but he drives the trade of contentment; and so he knows as well how to lack, as to abound. O the rare art, or rather miracle of contentment!

Wicked men are often disquieted in the enjoyment of all things. But the contented Christian is joyful in the lack of all things! But how does a Christian come to be contented in the deficiency of outward comforts? A Christian finds contentment distilled out of the breasts of the promises. He is poor in purse—but rich in promise. There is one promise that brings much sweet contentment into the soul: "Those who seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing." (Psalm 34:10) If the thing we desire is good for us—we shall have it. If it is not good, then the not having is good for us. The resting satisfied with the promise gives contentment.

Third excellency. Contentment makes a man in tune to serve God. It oils the wheels of the soul and makes it more agile and nimble; it composes the heart, and makes it fit for prayer, meditation, etc. How can he who is in a passion of grief, or discontent, "attend upon the Lord without distraction?" Contentment prepares and tunes the heart. First you prepare the violin, and wind up the strings, before you play a score of music. Just so, when a Christian's heart is wound up to this heavenly frame of contentment, then it is fit for duty. A discontented Christian is like Saul, when the evil spirit came upon him—O what jarrings and discords does he make in prayer! When an army is put into a disorder, then it is not fit for battle; when the thoughts are scattered and distracted about the cares of this life, a man is not fit for

devotion. Discontent takes the heart wholly off from God, and fixes it upon the present trouble, so that a man's mind is not upon his prayer—but upon his trouble. Discontent disjoins the soul; and it is impossible now that a Christian should go so steadily and cheerfully in God's service. O how lame is his devotion!

The discontented person gives God but a half-duty, and his religion is nothing but an external exercise, it lacks a soul to animate it. David would not offer that to God that cost him nothing." (2 Sa. 24:24) Where there is too much worldly care, there is too little spiritual cost in a duty. The discontented person does his duties by halves; he is just like Ephraim, "a cake not turned;" (Ho. 7:8) he is a cake baked on one side; he gives God the *outside* but not the *spiritual* part; his *heart* is not in duty; he is baked on one side—but the other side dough; and what profit is there of such raw undigested services? He who gives God only the *skin of worship*, what can he expect more than the *shell of comfort*? Contentment brings the heart into frame, and only then, do we give God the *flower* and *soul* of a duty, when the soul is composed. Now a Christian's heart is intent and serious. There are some duties which we cannot perform as we ought, without contentment, such as:

(1.) To rejoice in God. How can he rejoice—who is discontented? he is fitter for *repining*, than *rejoicing*.

(2.) To be thankful for mercy. Can a discontented person be thankful? He can be *fretful*, not *thankful*.

(3.) To justify God in his proceedings. How can he do this who is discontented with his condition? he will sooner *censure* God's wisdom, than clear his justice. O then, how excellent is contentment, which does prepare, and as it were, string the heart for duty? Indeed contentment does not only make our duties light and agile—but *acceptable to God*. It is this that puts beauty and worth into them; for contentment settles the soul. Now, as it is with milk, when it is always stirring, you can make nothing of it—but let it settle a while,

and then it turns to cream: when the heart is overmuch stirred with disquiet and discontent, you can make nothing of those duties. How thin, how fleeting and tedious are they! but when the heart is once settled by holy contentment, now there is some worth in our duties, now they turn to cream.

Fourth excellency. Contentment is the spiritual pillar of the soul. It fits a man to bear burdens. He who has a contented heart—is invincible under sufferings. A contented Christian is like the camomile, the more it is trodden upon—the more it grows. As medicine works disease out of the body—so does contentment work trouble out of the heart. Thus it argues, "if I am under reproach, God can vindicate me; if I am in need, God can relieve me." "You shall not see wind, neither shall you see rain—yet the valley shall be filled with water." (2 Ki. 3:17) Thus *holy contentment keeps the heart from fainting*.

In the autumn, when the *fruit* and *leaves* are blown off, still there is *sap* in the root. Just so, when there is an autumn upon our external felicity, the leaves of our estate drop off—still there is the sap of contentment in the heart. A Christian has life inwardly, when his outward comforts do not blossom. The contented heart is never out of heart.

Contentment is the golden shield, which beats back all discouragements. Humility is like the *lead* to the net—which keeps the soul down when it is rising through passion; and contentment is like the *cork* in the net—which keeps the heart up when it is sinking through discouragements. Contentment is the great under-prop; it is like the *steel beam*, which bears whatever weight is laid upon it; nay, it is like a *rock* which breaks the waves.

It is astonishing to observe the same affliction lying upon two men—how differently they respond to it. The contented Christian is like Samson, who carried away the gates of the city upon his back; he can go away with his cross cheerfully, and makes nothing of it: the other

is like Issachar, couching down under his burden. (Ge. 49:14) The reason is, the one is discontent, and that breeds fainting. Discontent swells the grief, and grief breaks the heart. When this sacred sinew of contentment begins to shrink, we go limping under our afflictions. We know not what burdens God may exercise us with; let us therefore preserve contentment; as is our contentment, such will be our courage. David with his five stones and his sling defied Goliath, and overcame him. Get but contentment into the sling of your heart; and with this sacred stone you may both defy the world and conquer it; you may break those afflictions, which otherwise would break you.

Fifth excellency. Contentment prevents many sins and temptations.

First, Contentment prevents many **SINS**. Where contentment is lacking—there is no lack of sin! Discontentedness with our condition is a sin that does not go alone—but is like the first link of the *chain*, which draws all the other links along with it. In particular, there are two sins which contentment prevents:

(1.) Contentment prevents **impatience**. Discontent and impatience are twins: "This evil is of the Lord—why should I wait on the Lord any longer!" (2 Ki. 6:33) As if God were so bound—that he must give us the mercy just when we desire it. Impatience is no small sin; as will appear if you consider whence it arises. It is for lack of *faith*. Faith gives a right notion of God; it is an intelligent grace; it believes that God's wisdom tempers— and his love sweetens all ingredients. This works patience. "Shall I not drink the cup which my Father has given me?"

Impatience is the daughter of *infidelity*. If a patient has a bad opinion of the physician, and thinks that he comes to poison him, he will take none of his remedies. Just so, when we have a prejudice against God, and think that he comes to kill us, and undo us—then we storm and cry out, like a foolish man, who cries out "away with

the remedy!" though it is in order to a cure. Is it not better that the remedy smart a little—than the wound fester and rankle?

Impatience is for lack of *love* of God. We will bear his reproofs, whom we love not only patiently—but thankfully. "Love thinks no evil." (1 Cor. 13:5). Love puts the fairest, and most kind gloss upon the actions of a friend; "love covers a multitude of evil." If it were possible for God in the least manner to err, which were blasphemy to think—love would cover that error! Love takes everything in the best sense, it makes us bear any stroke. "Love endures all things." (1 Cor. 13:7) Had we love to God—we would have patience.

Impatience is for lack of *humility*. An impatient man was never humbled under the burden of sin. He who studies his sins, the numberless number of them, how they are twisted together, and sadly accented; is patient and says, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." The greater noise drowns the lesser noise; when the *sea* roars—the *rivers* are still. Just so, he who lets his thoughts expatiate about sin, is both silent and amazed—he wonders that it is no *worse* with him.

How great then is this sin of impatience! And how excellent is contentment, which is a counterpoise against this sin! The contented Christian believing that God does all in love, is patient, and has not one word of complaint. That is the sin that contentment prevents.

(2.) Contentment prevents **murmuring**, a sin which is a degree higher than the other; murmuring is quarreling with God, and inveighing against him; "they spoke *against* God." (Nu. 21:5) The murmurer essentially says, that God has dealt wrongly with him, and he has deserved better from him. The murmurer charges God with folly and unkindness. This is the language, or rather blasphemy of a murmuring spirit; "God might have been a wiser and better God to me." The murmurer is a mutineer. The Israelites are called in the same text *murmurers* and *rebels*: (Nu. 17:10) and is not rebellion as the sin of witchcraft? You who are a murmurer, are in the account of

God as a witch, a sorcerer, as one that deals with the devil: this is a sin of the first magnitude.

Murmuring often ends in cursing: Micah's mother fell to cursing when the talents of silver were taken away, (Ju. 17:2) so does the murmurer when a part of his estate is taken away. Murmuring is the devil's music. This is that sin which God cannot bear, "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmurs against Me?" (Nu. 14:27) Murmuring is a sin which whets the sword against a people: it is a land-destroying sin; "neither murmur you as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer." (1 Cor. 10:10) Murmuring is a ripening sin; without mercy it will hasten England's funerals. O then, how excellent is contentment, which prevents this sin! To be contented, and yet murmur is an impossibility. A contented Christian acquiesces in his present condition, and does not murmur—but admire. Herein appears the excellency of contentment; it is a spiritual antidote against sin.

Secondly, Contentment prevents many **TEMPTATIONS**. Discontent is a devil which is always tempting.

1st. Discontent puts a man upon sinful means. He who is poor and discontented, will attempt anything; he will go to the devil for riches! He who is proud and discontented, will hang himself, as Ahithophel did when his counsel was rejected. *Satan takes great advantage of discontent; he loves to fish in these troubled waters.* Discontent both eclipses reason, and weakens faith! It is Satan's policy, that he usually breaks over the hedge where it is weakest; discontent makes a breach in the soul, and usually at this breach the devil enters by a temptation, and storms the soul.

How easily can the devil by his logic dispute a discontented Christian into sin? He forms such a argument as this, "he who is in need must study self-preservation: but you are now in need; therefore you ought to study self-preservation." Hereupon to make good his conclusion, he tempts to the forbidden fruit, not distinguishing between what is

needful, and what is *lawful*. "What?" says he, "do you lack a livelihood? never be such a fool as starve—take the *rising* side at a venture, be it good or bad; "eat the bread of deceit, drink the wine of violence." Thus you see how the discontented man is a prey to that sad temptation to steal.

Contentment is a shield against poverty; for he who is contented, knows as well how to *lack*, as to *abound*. He will not sin to get a living; though his food grows short, he is content. He lives as the birds of the air—upon God's providence, and doubts not but he shall have enough to pay for his passage to heaven.

2d. Discontent tempts a man to atheism and apostasy.

"Surely, there is no God to take care of things here below! Would he allow his holy people to be in need?" says discontent. "Throw off Christ's livery, desist from the religion!" Thus Job's wife being discontented with her condition, says to her husband, "do you still retain your integrity?" As if she had said, "do you not see, Job, what has become of all your religion? You fear God and eschew evil—and what are you the better? see how God turns his hand against you; he has smitten you in your body, estate, family—and do you still retain your integrity? What! still devout? still weep and pray for him? you fool, cast off religion, turn atheist!" Here was a sore temptation, which the devil handed over to Job by his discontented wife. Only his grace, as a golden shield, did ward off the blow from his heart, "you speak as one of the foolish women!"

"What profit is it," says the discontented person, "to serve the Almighty? Those who never trouble themselves about religion, are the prosperous men, and I in the mean while suffer need. I will just as well give over driving the trade of religion—if this be all my reward!" This logic often prevails. *Atheism is the fruit which grows out of the blossom of discontent.*

O then, behold the excellency of contentment! "If God is mine," says the contented spirit, "it is enough; though I have no lands or

tenements, his smile makes heaven; his loves are better than wine. I have little in *hand*—but much in *hope*; my livelihood is short—but this is his promise, even eternal life! I am persecuted by malice—but better is *persecuted godliness*, than *prosperous wickedness*." Thus divine contentment is a spiritual antidote both against *sin* and temptation.

Sixth excellency. Contentment sweetens every condition.

Christ turned the water into wine. Just so, contentment turns the *bitter waters of Marah*, into spiritual wine.

"Have I but little? Yet it is more than I deserve. This contented spirit is given in mercy; it is the fruit of Christ's blood—it is the legacy of free grace! A small present sent from a king—is highly valued. This little I have is with a good conscience; it is not stolen waters; guilt has not muddied or poisoned it; it runs pure. This little—is a pledge of more: this bit of bread—is a pledge of that bread which I shall eat in the kingdom of God! This little water in the cruise—is a pledge of that heavenly nectar which shall be distilled from the true vine! Do I meet with some crosses? My comfort is, if they are heavy—I have not far to go; I shall but carry my cross to Golgotha and there I shall leave it. My cross is light—in comparison with the weight of glory. Has God taken away my comforts from me? It is well--the Comforter still abides with me."

Thus contentment, as a honeycomb, drops sweetness into every condition. Discontent is a leaven which sours every comfort; it puts vinegar into every mercy, it doubles every cross. But the contented spirit sucks sweetness from every flower of providence; it can make poison into a choice morsel. Contentment is full of consolation.

Seventh excellency. Contentment is the best commentator upon providence; it makes a fair interpretation of all God's dealings. Let the providences of God be ever so dark or dismal, contentment construes them ever in the best sense. I may say of it, as the apostle of charity, "it thinks no evil." (1 Cor. 13:5) "*Sickness* (says

contentment) is God's furnace to refine his gold, and make it sparkle the more! The prison is an oratory, or house of prayer. What if God melts away the creature from it? he saw perhaps my heart grew so much in love with it; had I been long in that fat pasture, I would have surfeited, and the better my estate had been, the worse my soul would have been. God is wise; he has done this either to prevent some sin—or to exercise some grace." What a blessed frame of heart is this!

A contented Christian is an advocate for God, against unbelief and impatience: whereas discontent takes everything from God in the worst sense; it censures God—and all that He does. But the contented soul takes all well; and when his condition is ever so bad, he can say, "truly God is good." (Psalm 73:1)

II. The second motive to contentment. A Christian has that which may make him content.

1. Has not God given you Christ? In him there are "unsearchable riches!" (Ep. 3:8) He is such a golden mine of wisdom and grace—that all the saints and angels can never dig to the bottom! As Seneca said to his friend Polybius, "never complain of your hard fortune—as long as Caesar is your friend." So I say to a believer, "never complain of your troubles—as long as Christ is your friend!" He is an enriching pearl, a sparkling diamond; the infinite luster of his merits makes us shine in God's eyes. (Ep. 1:7) In him there is both *fullness* and *sweetness*; he is *unspeakably* good. Pitch up your thoughts to the highest pinnacle, stretch them to the utmost bound, let them expatiate to their full latitude and extent—yet they fall infinitely short of these *ineffable* and *inexhaustible treasures* which are locked up in Jesus Christ! Is not this enough to give the soul contentment? A Christian who lacks necessities—yet having Christ, he has the "one thing needful."

2. Your soul is exercised and enameled with the graces of the Spirit, and is not here enough to give contentment? Grace is of

a divine birth! it is the new plantation!. Grace is the flower of the heavenly paradise! it is the embroidery of the Spirit! Grace is the seed of God! (1 John 3:9) Grace is the sacred unction! (1 John 2:20) Grace is Christ's portraiture in the soul! Grace is the very foundation on which superstructure of *glory* is laid! O, of what infinite value is grace! What a jewel is *faith*! Well may it be called "precious faith." (2 Pe. 1:1) What is *love*—but a divine sparkle in the soul? A soul beautified with grace, is like a room richly hung with tapestry, or the sky bespangled with glittering stars.

These are the "true riches!" (Lu. 16:11) Is not here enough to give the soul contentment? What are all other things, but like wings of a butterfly, curiously painted—but they defile our fingers! Earthly riches cannot enrich the soul: oftentimes *under silken apparel there is a thread-bare soul*. Earthly riches are *corruptible*: "riches are not forever," as the wise man says. (Proverbs 27:24) Heaven is a place where gold and silver will not go. A believer is rich towards God! (Lu. 12:21) Why then, are you discontented? has not God given you that which is better than the world? What if he does not give you the *box*—if he gives you the *jewel*! What if he denies you *pennies*—if he pays you in *diamonds*! What if he denies you *temporal* mercies—if he give you *spiritual* mercies. What if the water in the *bottle* is spent—you have enough in the *fountain*! What need he complain of the *world's* emptiness—who has *God's* fullness!

"The Lord is my portion," says David, (Psalm 16:5) then let the lines fall where they will, in a sick-bed or prison, I will say, "the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yes, I have a goodly heritage!" Are you not heir to all the promises? Have you not a guarantee of heavenly glory? When you let go your hold of *natural* life—are you not sure of *eternal* life? Has not God given you the pledge and first fruits of glory? Is not here enough to work your heart to contentment?

III. The third motive is—Be content, for else we confute our own prayers. We pray, "May your will be done." It is the will of

God that we should are in such a condition; he has decreed it, and he sees it best for us—why then do we murmur, and are discontent at that which we pray for? either we are not in good earnest in our prayer, which argues hypocrisy; or we contradict ourselves which argues folly.

IV. The fourth motive to contentment is—Because now God has his end, and Satan misses of his end.

1. God has his end. God's end in all his providences, is to bring the heart to submit and be content. Indeed, this pleases God much—he loves to see his children satisfied with that portion he carves and allots them; it contents him—to see us contented. Therefore let us acquiesce in God's providence, now God has his end.

2. Satan misses of his end. The end why the devil, though by God's permission, did smite Job in his body and estate—was to perplex his mind; he vexed his body with the purpose that he might disquiet his spirit. He hoped to bring Job into a fit of discontent; and then that he would in anger, break forth against God. But Job being so well-contented with his condition—that he falls to blessing of God, and so he did disappoint Satan of his hope. "The devil will cast some of you into prison;" (Re. 2:10) why does the devil throw us into prison? It is not so much the hurting our body, as the molesting our mind, that he aims at; he would imprison our contentment, and disturb the regular motion of our souls—this is his design. It is not so much the putting us into a *prison*—as the putting us into a *passion*—which he attempts; but by *holy contentment*, Satan loses his prey, and misses of his end.

The devil has often deceived us; the best way to deceive him, is by contentment in the midst of temptation; our contentment will discontent Satan. O, let us not gratify our enemy! *Discontent is the devil's delight!* Now it is as he would have it, he loves to warm himself at the fire of our passions. Repentance is the joy of the angels—and discontent is the joy of the devils! As the devil dances at

discord, so he sings at discontent. The fire of our passions makes the devil a bonfire! It is a kind of heaven to him—to see us torturing ourselves with our own troubles; but by holy contentment, we frustrate him of his purpose, and do as it were put him out of countenance.

V. The fifth motive is to contentment is—By contentment a Christian gains a victory over himself. For a man to be able to rule his own spirit—this of all others, is the most noble conquest. Passion denotes weakness; to be discontented is suitable to flesh and blood. But to be in every state content, reproached—yet content, imprisoned—yet content; this is above nature; this is some of that holy valor and chivalry which only a divine spirit is able to infuse. In the midst of the affronts of the world, to be patient; and in the changes of the world, to have the spirit calmed—this is a conquest worthy indeed of the garland of honor. Holy Job, divested and turned out of all, leaving his scarlet, and embracing the dunghill, (a sad catastrophe!) yet had learned contentment. It is said, "he fell down upon the ground and worshiped." (Job 1:20) One would have thought he should have fallen upon the ground and blasphemed! No, he fell and worshiped! He adored God's justice and holiness! Behold the strength of grace! here was a humble submission—yet a noble conquest; he got the victory over himself! It is no great matter for a man to yield to his own passions, this is facile and cowardly—but to content himself in denying of himself, this is sacred.

VI. The sixth great motive to work the heart to contentment is—The consideration that all God's providences, however cross or difficult, shall do a believer good. "And we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God." (Rom. 8:28) Not only all *good* things—but all *evil* things work for good; and shall we be discontented at that which works for our good? Suppose our troubles are sadly twisted together: what if sickness, poverty, reproach, law-suits, etc., unite and muster their forces against us? all shall work for good; our *maladies* shall be our *medicines*; and shall we repine at which shall undoubtedly do us good? "Unto the upright,

there arises light in darkness." (Psalm 112:4) Affliction may be baptized Marah; it is bitter—but medicinal. Because this is so full of comfort, and may be a most excellent remedy against discontent, I shall a little expatiate. It will be inquired **how the evils of affliction work for good?** Several ways.

First, They instruct us—they TEACH us. The Psalmist having very elegantly described the church's trouble, (Psalm 74) prefixed this title to the psalm, *a Maschil*, which signifies a psalm giving *instruction*; and that which seals up instruction, works for good. God puts us sometimes under the *black rod* of discipline; "*hear the rod, and who has appointed it.*" (Mi. 6:9) God makes our *adversity* our *university*. Affliction is a preacher; "blow the trumpet in Tekoa:" (Je. 6:1) the trumpet was to preach to the people; "be instructed, O Jerusalem." (Je. 6:8) Sometimes God speaks to the minister to lift up his voice like a trumpet, (Is. 58:1) and here he speaks to the trumpet to lift up its voice like a minister.

Afflictions teach us **humility**. We are commonly prosperous and proud, but *corrections are God's corrosives to eat out the proud flesh*. Jesus Christ is the lily of the *valleys*, (Can. 2:1) he dwells in a *humble* heart! God brings us into the valley of *tears*—that He may bring us into the valley of *humility*; "remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall; my soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. (La. 3:19,20) When men are grown proud, God has no better way with them, than to brew them a cup of wormwood.

Afflictions are compared to thorns, (Ho. 2:6) God's thorns are to prick the bubble of pride. Suppose a man runs at another with a sword to kill him; accidentally, it only lets out his abscess of pride; this does him good: God's sword is to let out the abscess of pride; and shall that which makes us humble, make us discontented?

Afflictions teach us **repentance**; "You have disciplined me—and I have been disciplined. After I strayed, I repented." (Jer. 31:18,19)

Repentance is the precious fruit that grows upon the cross. When the fire is put under the still, the water drops. Just so, fiery afflictions make the waters of repentance drop and distill from the eyes; and is here any cause of discontent?

Afflictions teach us to **pray** better, "they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them;" (Is. 26:16) before, they would *say* a prayer; now they *poured* out a prayer. Jonah was asleep in the ship—but awake and at prayer in the whale's belly. When God puts under the fire-brands of affliction, now our hearts boil over the more; God loves to have his children possessed with a spirit of prayer. Never did David, the sweet singer of Israel, tune his harp more melodiously, never did he pray better, than when he was in affliction. Thus afflictions instruct us; and shall we be discontent at that which is for our good?

Secondly, Afflictions TEST us. (Psalm 66:10,11) Gold is not the worse for being tried, or grain for being fanned. Affliction is the touchstone of sincerity, it tries what metal we are made of; affliction is God's *fan* and his *sieve*. It is good that men be known; some serve God for a livery; they are like the fisherman, who makes use of the net, only to catch the fish; so they go a-fishing with the net of religion, only to catch preferment: affliction discovers these. Hypocrites will fail in a *storm*, true grace holds out in the *winter-season*. That is a precious faith which, like the stars, shines brightest in the darkest night. It is good that our graces should be brought to trial; thus we have the comfort, and the gospel the honor—and why then be discontented?

Thirdly, Afflictions are purgatives. These evils work for our good, because they *purge out sin*, and shall I be discontented at this? What if I have more trouble, if I have less sin? The brightest day has its clouds; the purest gold its dross; the most refined soul has some measure of corruption. The saints lose nothing in the furnace—but what they can well spare—their dross: is not this for our good? Why then should we murmur? "I am come to send fire on the earth." (Lu.

12:49) Tertullian understands it of the fire of affliction. God makes this like the fire of the three children, which burned only their bonds and set them at liberty in the furnace, so the fire of affliction serves to burn the bonds of iniquity. "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged: and this is all the fruit—to take away his sin." (Is. 27:9)

When affliction or death comes to a wicked man, it takes away his *soul*; when it comes to a godly man, it only takes away his *sin*; is there any cause why we should be discontented? God steeps us in the *brinish waters of affliction*, that he make take out our spots. God's people are his husbandry; (1 Cor. 3:9) the *ploughing* of the ground kills the weeds, and the *harrowing* of the earth breaks the hard clods: God's *ploughing* of us by affliction, is to kill the weeds of sin; his *harrowing* of us is to break the hard clouds of impenitency, that the heart may be fitter to receive the seeds of grace; and if this is the purpose of affliction, why should we be discontented?

Fourthly, Afflictions both exercise and increase our grace. Afflictions **exercise** our graces; everything is most in its excellency when it is most in its exercise. Our grace, though it cannot be dead—yet it may be asleep, and has need of awakening. What a dull thing is the *fire* when it is hid in the embers, or the *sun* when it is masked behind a cloud! A sick man is living—but not lively; afflictions quicken and excite grace. God does not like to see grace in the eclipse. Now faith puts forth its purest and most noble acts in times of affliction. God makes the *fall* of the leaf the *spring* of our graces. What if we are more afflicted—if graces be more active.

Afflictions **increase** grace; as the wind serves to increase and blow up the flame, so does the windy blasts of affliction augment and blow up our graces; grace is not *consumed* in the furnace—but it is like the widow's oil in the cruise, which *increased* by pouring out. The torch, when it is beaten burns brightest, so does grace when it is exercised by sufferings. Sharp frosts nourish the good grain—so do sharp afflictions nourish grace. Some plants grow better in the *shade* than

in the *sun*; the shade of *adversity* is better for some than the sunshine of *prosperity*. Naturalists observe that the *colewort* thrives better when it is watered with salt water than with fresh water, so do some thrive better in the *salt water of affliction*; and shall we be discontented at that which makes us grow and fructify more?

Fifthly, These afflictions do bring more of God's gracious presence into the soul. When we are most *assaulted*, we shall be most *assisted*; "I will be with him in trouble." (Psalm 91:15) It cannot be ill with that man with whom God is—by his powerful presence in *supporting*, and his gracious presence in *sweetening* the present trial. God will be with us in trouble, not only to *behold* us—but to *uphold* us, as he was with Daniel in the lion's den, and the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. What if we have more trouble than others—if we have more of God with us than others have? We never have sweeter *smiles* from God's face—than when the world begins to *frown* upon us. Your statutes have been my song; where? not when I was upon the *throne*—but "in the house of my *pilgrimage*." (Psalm 119:54)

We read, the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire: (1 Ki. 19:11) but in a metamorphical and spiritual sense, when the *wind* of affliction blows upon a believer, God is in the wind; when the *fire* of affliction kindles upon him, God is in the fire—to sanctify, to support, to sweeten. If God is with us, the *furnace* shall be turned into a *festival*, the *prison* into a *paradise*, the *earthquake* into a *joyful dance*. O why should I be discontented, when I have more of God's gracious presence!

Sixthly, These evils of affliction are for good, as they bring with them certificates of God's love, and are evidences of his special favor. Affliction is the saint's livery; it is a badge of honor! That the God of glory should look upon a worm, and take so much notice of him—as to afflict him rather than lose him—is an high act of favor. God's rod is a scepter of dignity, Job calls God's *afflicting* of us, his *magnifying* of us. (Job 7:17) Some men's

prosperity has been their shame, when others *afflictions* have been their crown.

Seventhly, These afflictions work for our good, because they work for us a far exceeding weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17) That which works for my glory in heaven, works for my good. We do not read in Scripture that any man's *honor* or *riches* work for him a weight of *glory*—but afflictions do; and shall a man be discontented at that which works for his glory? The heavier the weight of *affliction*, the heavier the weight of *glory*; not that our sufferings *merit* glory, (as the papists do wickedly teach,) but though they are not the *cause* of our crown—yet they are the *way* to it; and God makes us, as he did our *captain*, "perfect through sufferings." (He. 2:10) And shall not all this make us contented with our condition?

O I beseech you, look not upon the *evil* of affliction—but the *good* of affliction! Afflictions in Scripture are called "visitations." (Job 7:18) God's afflictions are but *friendly visits*. Behold here God's rod, like Aaron's rod *blossoming*; and Jonathan's rod, it has *honey* at the end of it. Poverty shall starve out our sins; the sickness of the body cures a sin-sick soul; O then, instead of murmuring and being discontented, bless the Lord! Had you not met with such a *cross* in the way—you might have gone to hell and never stopped!

VII. The seventh motive to contentment is—Consider the evil of discontent. Malcontent has a mixture of *grief* and *anger* in it, and both of these must needs raise a storm in the soul. Have you not seen the posture of a sick man? Sometimes he will sit up on his bed, by and by he will lie down, and when he is down he is not quiet; first he turns on the one side and then on the other; he is restless; this is just the emblem of a discontented spirit. The man is not sick—yet he is never well; sometimes he likes such a condition of life but is soon weary; and then another condition of life; and when he has it—yet he is not pleased; this is an evil under the sun. Now the evil of discontent appears in three things.

First Evil. The SORDIDNESS of it is unworthy of a Christian.

(1.) It is unworthy of his profession. It was the saying of a heathen, "bear your condition quietly; know you are a man;" so I say, "bear your condition contentedly, know you are a Christian." You professes to live by faith: what? and not be content? Faith is a grace which substantiates things not seen; (He. 11:1) faith looks beyond the present—it feeds upon promises; faith lives not by bread alone; when the water is spent in the bottle, faith knows where to have recourse. Now to see a Christian dejected in the lack of visible supplies, where is faith? "O," says one, "my estate in the world is down." Ay, and which is worse—his *faith* is down. Unless he has many outward comforts—he will not be content. True faith will trust God's heart—where it cannot trace his hand; and will venture upon God's promise though it has nothing in view.

You who are discontented because you have not all that you would, let me tell you—either your faith is a nonentity—or at best but an embryo. It is a weak faith which must have *crutches* to support it. Nay, discontent is not only below *faith*—but below *reason*: why are you discontented? Is it because you are dispossessed of such comforts? Well, and have you not *reason* to guide you? Does not reason tell you that you are but tenants at will? And may not God turn you out when he pleases? You hold not your estate by personal right—but upon God's favor and courtesy.

(2.) It is unworthy of the relation we stand in to God. A Christian is invested with the title and privilege of sonship, (Ep. 1:5) he is an heir of the promise. O consider the lot of free-grace which has fallen upon you! You are nearly allied to Christ, and of the blood royal; you are advanced in some sense, above the angels: "why are you, being the king's son, lean from day to day?" (2 Sa. 13:4) Why are you discontented? O, how unworthy is this! as if the heir to some great monarch should go pining up and down, because he may not pick such a flower.

Second Evil. Consider the SINFULNESS of discontent; which appears in three things; the causes, the accompaniments, the consequences of it.

(1.) It is sinful in the CAUSES.

The first cause of discontent is **pride**. He who thinks highly of his deserts, usually is discontent with his condition. A discontented man is a proud man, he thinks himself better than others, therefore finds fault with the wisdom of God. "Should the thing that was created say to the One who made it—Why have you made me like this?" (Ro. 9:20) why am I not in better circumstances? *Discontent is nothing else but the boiling over of pride!*

The second cause of discontent is **envy**, which Augustine calls the sin of the devil. Satan envied Adam the glory of paradise, and the robe of innocency. He who envies what his neighbor has—is never contented with that portion which God's providence, parcels out to him. As envy stirs up strife, so it creates discontent: the envious man looks so much upon the blessings which another enjoys—that he cannot see his own mercies—and so does continually vex and torture himself. Cain envied that his brother's sacrifice was accepted, and his rejected; hereupon he was discontented, and presently murderous thoughts began to arise in his heart.

The third cause of discontent is **covetousness**. This is a foul sin. Whence are vexing lawsuits—but from discontent? and whence is discontent—but from covetousness? Covetousness and contentedness cannot dwell in the same heart. Avarice is never satisfied. The covetous man is like Behemoth, "behold he drinks up a river." (Job 40:23) "There are four things (says Solomon) which never have enough." I may add a fifth—the heart of a covetous man; he is continually craving. Covetousness is like a wolf in the breast, which is ever feeding. Because a man is never satisfied—he is never content.

The fourth cause of discontent is **unbelief**, which is akin to Atheism. The discontented person is ever distrustful. The provisions grow scanty, and the distrustful person asks, "I am in these great difficulties, can God help me? Can he prepare a table in the wilderness? Surely he cannot. My estate is exhausted, can God help me? My friends are gone, can God raise me up more? Surely the arm of his power is shrunk. I am like the dry fleece, can any water come upon this fleece? If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" (2 Ki. 7:2) Thus the *anchor of hope*, and the *shield of faith*, being cast away, the soul goes pining up and down. Discontent is nothing else but the echo of unbelief. Remember, *distrust* is worse than *distress*.

(2.) Discontent is evil in its ACCOMPANIMENTS, which are two:

1. Discontent is joined with a sullen melancholy. A Christian of a right temper should be ever cheerful in God: "serve the Lord with gladness;" (Psalm 100:2) A sign that the oil of *grace* has been poured into the heart, is when the oil of *gladness* shines in the countenance. Cheerfulness credits religion; how can the discontented person be cheerful? Discontent is a dogged, sullen humor. Because we have not what we desire, God shall not have a good work or look from us. This is like the bird in the cage, because she is pent up, and cannot fly in the open air, therefore beats herself against the cage, and is ready to kill herself. Thus that peevish prophet; "I do well to be angry, even unto death!" (Jon. 4:9)

2. Discontent is accompanied with unthankfulness. Because we have not all we desire, we never mind the mercies which we have. We deal with God as the widow of Zarephath did with the prophet: the prophet Elijah had been a means to keep her alive in the famine, for it was for his sake, that her meal in the barrel, and her oil in the cruise failed not. But as soon as ever her son dies, she falls into a passion, and begins to quarrel with the prophet: "O man of God, what have you done to me? Have you come here to punish my sins by

killing my son?" (1 Ki. 17:18) So ungratefully do we deal with God: we can be content to receive *mercies* from God—but if he crosses us in the least thing, then, through discontent, we grow touchy and impatient, and are ready to fly upon God! Thus God loses all his mercies.

We read in Scripture of the thank-offering; the discontented person cuts God short of this; the Lord loses his thank-offering. A discontented Christian repines in the midst of *mercies*—as Adam who sinned in the midst of *paradise*. Discontent is a spider which sucks the poison of unthankfulness out of the sweetest flowers of God's mercies! Discontent is a devilish chemistry, which extracts dross out of the most pure gold. The discontented person thinks everything he does for God too much, and everything God does for him too little.

O what a sin is unthankfulness! It is an accumulative sin. I may say of ingratitude: "there are many sins bound up in this one sin." It is a voluminous wickedness! How full of sin is discontent! A discontented Christian, because he has not all the world, therefore dishonors God with the mercies which he has. God made Eve out of Adam's rib, to be a helper—but the devil has made an arrow of this rib, and shot Adam to the heart! Just so, discontent takes the rib of God's mercy, and ungratefully shoots at him—every blessing is employed against God. Thus it is oftentimes. Behold then how discontent and ingratitude are interwoven and twisted one within the other: thus discontent is sinful in its accompaniments.

(3.) Discontent is sinful in its CONSEQUENCES, which are these.

1. Discontent makes a man very unlike the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is a *meek* Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended in the likeness of a *dove*, (Mat. 3:16) a dove is the emblem of meekness; a discontented spirit is not a meek spirit.

2. Discontent makes a man like the devil; the devil being swelled with the poison of envy and malice, is never content. Just so, is the malcontent. The devil is an unquiet spirit, he is still "walking about," (1 Pe. 5:8) it is his rest to be walking. And herein is the discontented person like him; for he goes up and down vexing himself, "seeking rest, and finding none." The malcontent is the devil's picture!

3. Discontent disjoins the soul, it untunes the heart for duty. "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray." (Ja. 5:13) But, is any man discontented? how shall he pray? "Lift up holy hands without wrath." (1 Ti. 2:8) Discontent is full of wrath and passion; the malcontent cannot lift up *pure* hands; he lifts up *leprous* hands—he *poisons* his prayers! Will God accept a poisoned sacrifice! Chrysostom compares prayer to a fine garland; those who make a garland, their hands had need to be clean. Prayer is a precious garland, the heart that makes it, had need to be clean. Discontent throws poison into the spring. Discontent puts the heart into a disorder and mutiny, and such as one cannot serve the Lord "without distraction."

4. Discontent sometimes unfits for the very use of reason. Jonah, in a passion of discontent, spoke no better than blasphemy and nonsense: "I do well to be angry—even unto death!" (Jon. 4:9) What? to be angry with God! and to die for anger! Sure he did not know what he said! When discontent rules, then, like Moses, we speak unadvisedly with our lips. This humor even suspends the very acts of reason.

5. Discontent does not only disquiet a man's self—but those who are near him. This evil spirit troubles families, parishes, etc. If there is but one string out of tune, it spoils all the music. Just so, one discontented spirit makes jarrings and discords among others. It is this ill-humor which breeds quarrels and law-suits. Whence are all our contentions—but for lack of contentment? "What is the source of the wars and the fights among you? Don't they come from the

cravings that are at war within you?" (Ja. 4:1) in particular from the craving of discontent. Why did Absalom raise a war against his father, and would have taken off not only his crown—but his head! Was it not his discontent? Absalom would be king. Why did Ahab stone Naboth? was it not discontent about the vineyard? *Oh this devil of discontent!* Thus, you have seen the sinfulness of it.

Third Evil. Consider the FOOLISHNESS of discontent. I may say, as the Psalmist, "surely they are disquieted in vain:" (Psalm 39:6) which appears thus,

1. Is it not a vain simple thing to be troubled at the loss of that which is in its own nature, perishing and changeable? God has put a vicissitude into the creature; all the world rings changes; and for me to meet with inconstancy here on earth—to lose a friend, estate, to be in constant fluctuation; is no more than to see a flower wither or a leaf drop off in autumn! There is an autumn upon every comfort, a fall of the leaf. Now it is extreme folly to be discontented at the loss of those things which are in their own nature, loseable. What Solomon says of riches, is true of all things under the sun, "they take wings—and fly away!" Noah's dove brought an olive-branch in its mouth—but presently flew out of the ark, and never more returned. Such and such a comfort, brings to us honey in its mouth—but it has wings; and to what purpose should we be troubled, unless we had wings to fly after and overtake it?

2. Discontent is a heart-breaking. "By sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken." (Proverbs 15:13) It takes away the comfort of life. There is none of us, but may have many mercies if we can see them; now because we have not all we desire, therefore we will lose the comfort of that which we have already. Jonah having his gourd smitten, a withering vanity—was so discontented, that he never thought of his miraculous deliverance out of the whale's belly; he takes no comfort of his life—but wishes that he might die. What folly is this! We must have all or none; herein we are like children, that

throw away the piece which is cut for them, because they may have no bigger. *Discontent eats out the comfort of life!*

Besides, it were well if it were seriously weighed, how harmful this is even to our health; for discontent, as it does disscruciate the mind—so it does pine the body. It *frets* as a moth; and by wasting the spirits, weakens the vitals. The *cancer of discontent* harms both the body and the mind—and is not this folly?

3. Discontent does not ease us of our burden—but it makes it heavier. A contented spirit goes cheerfully under its affliction. Discontent makes our grief as unsupportable as it is unreasonable. If the leg is well, it can endure a fetter and not complain; but if the leg is injured, then the fetters trouble. Discontent of mind, is the sore which makes the fetters of affliction more grievous. *Discontent troubles us more than the trouble itself!* It steeps the affliction in wormwood. When Christ was upon the Cross, the Jews brought him gall and vinegar to drink, that it might add to his sorrow. Discontent brings to a man in affliction, gall and vinegar to drink! This is worse than the affliction itself. Is it not folly for a man to embitter his own affliction?

4. Discontent spins out our troubles the longer. One is discontented because he is in need, and therefore he is in need because he is discontented; he murmurs because he is afflicted, and therefore he is afflicted, because he murmurs. Discontent delays and adjourns our mercies. God deals herein with us, as we do with our children—when they are quiet and cheerful, they shall have anything; but if we see them cry and fret, then we withhold from them. Just so, we get nothing from God by our discontent, but blows! The more the child struggles, the more it is beaten: when we struggle with God by our sinful passions, he doubles his strokes; God will tame our peevish hearts. What did Israel get by their peevishness? they were within eleven days journey to Canaan; and now they were discontented and began to murmur, so God leads them a march of

forty years long in the wilderness. Is it not folly for us to adjourn our own mercies? Thus you have seen the evil of discontent.

VIII. The eighth motive to contentment is this: Why is not a man content with that which he has? Perhaps if he had more he would be less content. Covetousness is cancer which is never satisfied. The **world** is such that the more we have—the more we crave. The **world** cannot fill the heart of man. When the fire burns, how do you quench it? not by putting *oil* in the flame, or laying on more *wood*—but by withdrawing the fuel. When the appetite is inflamed after riches, how may a man be satisfied? not by having just what he desires—but by withdrawing the fuel, and by moderating and lessening his desires. *He who is contented has enough!* A man in a fever thirsts; how do you satisfy him? not by giving him liquid things, which will inflame his thirst the more; but by removing the cause, and so curing the distemper. The way for a man to be contented, is not by raising his estate higher—but by bringing his heart lower!

IX. The ninth motive to contentment is—The shortness of life. Life is "but a vapor," says James. (Ja. 4:14) Life is a wheel ever-running. The poets painted time with *wings* to show the volubility and swiftness of it. Job compares it to a swift runner, (Job 9:25). Our life is indeed like a day. *Infancy* is as it were the day-break, *youth* is the sun-rising, *adulthood* is the sun in the meridian, *old age* is sun-setting, *sickness* is the evening—then comes the night of *death*. How quickly is this day of life spent! Oftentimes this sun goes down at noon-day; life ends before the evening of old age comes. Nay, sometimes the sun of life sets presently after sun-rising. Quickly after the dawning of infancy, the night of death approaches. *O, how short is the life of man!*

The consideration of the brevity of life, may work the heart to contentment. Remember you are to be here but a day; you have but a short way to go—and what is the need of a long provision for a short way? If a traveler has but enough to bring him to his journey's end—

he desires no more. We have but a day to live, and perhaps we may be in the twelfth hour of the day. If God gives us but enough to bear our charges, until night, it is sufficient, let us be content. If a man had the lease of a house—but for two or three days, and he should begin building and planting, would he not be judged very foolish? Just so, when we have but a short time here, and death calls us presently off the stage—to thirst immoderately after the world, and pull down our souls to build up an estate—is an extreme folly.

Therefore, as Esau said once, in a profane sense, concerning his birth-right, "I am at the point of death—so what profit shall this birth-right do to me?" so let a Christian say in a religious sense, "I am at the point of death, my grave is going to be made—so what good will the world do to me? If I have but enough until sun-setting, I am content."

X. The tenth motive to contentment is—Consider seriously the nature of a prosperous condition. There are in a prosperous estate three things,

1. There is more TROUBLE in a prosperous condition. Many who have abundance of all things to enjoy—yet have not so much contentment and sweetness in their lives, as some who go to their hard labor. Sad, anxious thoughts often attend a prosperous condition. *Worry is the evil spirit which haunts the rich man*—and will not allow him to be quiet. When his chest is full of gold—his heart is full of worry, either how to *manage*, or how to *increase*, or how to *secure* what he has gotten. O the troubles and perplexities which attend prosperity! The world's *high* seats are very uneasy. Sunshine is pleasant—but sometimes it *scorches* with its heat. The bee gives honey—but sometimes it stings! Just so, prosperity has its sweetness—and also its sting! "But godliness with contentment is great gain." 1 Timothy 6:6. Never did Jacob sleep better, than when he had the heavens for his canopy, and a hard stone for his pillow. A large estate is but like a long trailing garment, which is more troublesome than useful.

2. In a prosperous condition there is more DANGER; and that two ways:

First, in respect of a man's SELF. The rich man's table is often his snare; he is ready to engulf himself too deep in these *sweet waters*. In this sense it is hard to know *how to abound*. It must be a strong brain which can bear heady wine. Just so, he has need have of much wisdom and grace, to know how to bear a prosperous condition; either he is ready to kill himself with worry—or to glut himself with luscious delights. O the hazard of honor, the damage of prosperity! Pride, lust, and worldliness, are the three worms which breed in prosperity. (De. 32:15) The *pastures of prosperity* are dangerous. How soon are we ensnared upon the *soft pillow of ease*! Prosperity is often a trumpet which sounds a retreat—it calls men off from the pursuit of religion. The *sun of prosperity* often dulls and puts out the fire of piety! How many souls has the *cancer of abundance* killed? "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." (1 Timothy 6:9-10)

The world is full of golden sands—but they are quick-sands! Prosperity, like smooth Jacob, will supplant and betray! A great estate, without much vigilance—will be a thief to rob us of heaven! Such as are upon the *pinnacle of honor*, are in most danger of falling. A more humble condition, is less hazardous. The little boat rides safely along, when the gallant ship with its large mast and top-sail, is cast away. Adam in *paradise* was overcome, when Job on the *dung-hill* was a conqueror. Samson fell asleep in Delilah's lap. Just so, some have fallen so fast asleep on the lap of ease and plenty, that they have never awaked until they have been in hell!

The world's *fawning*—is worse than its *frowning*! It is more to be feared when it *smiles*—than when it *thunders*. Prosperity, in Scripture, is compared to a candle; "his candle shined upon my

head:" (Job 29:3) how many have burnt their wings about this candle! The corn being over-ripe, withers; and fruit, when it mellows, begins to rot. Just so, when men mellow with the sun of prosperity, commonly their souls begin to rot in sin! "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" (Lu. 18:24) His *golden weights* keep him from ascending up the hill of God! And shall we not be content, though we are placed in a lower orb? What if we have not as much of the world, as others do? We are not in so much danger! As we lack the riches of the world—so we lack their temptations. O the abundance of danger—which is in abundance!

When men's estates are low, they are more serious about their souls, and more humble. But when they have abundance, then their hearts begin to swell with their estates. Bring a man from the cold, starving climate of poverty—into the hot southern climate of prosperity—and he begins to lose his appetite to godly things, he grows weak—and a thousand to one if all his religion does not die! But bring a Christian from a rich flourishing estate into a low condition—and he has a better appetite after heavenly things, he hungers more after Christ, he thirsts more for grace, he eats more of the Bread of Life; this man is now likely to live and hold out in his piety. Be content then, with moderation; if you have but enough to pay for your passage to heaven, it suffices. "If we have food and clothing—we will be content with these." 1 Timothy 6:8

Secondly, a prosperous condition is dangerous in regard of OTHERS. A great estate, for the most part, draws **envy** to it; whereas in *little* there is quiet. David a *shepherd* was quiet—but David a *king* was pursued by his enemies. Envy cannot endure a superior; an envious man knows not how to live—but upon the ruins of his neighbors; he raises himself higher—by bringing others lower. Prosperity is an eye-sore to many. Such sheep as have most wool—are soonest fleeced. The *barren* tree grows peaceably; but the *fruit-laden* tree shall have many savage suitors. O then be contented to carry a lesser sail! He who has less revenues, has less envy. Such as

make the greatest show in the world, are the bulls-eye for envy and malice to shoot at!

3. A prosperous condition has in it, a greater RECKONING; every man must be responsible for his talents. You who have great possessions in the world, do you use them for God's glory? Are you rich in good works? Grace makes a private person—a common good. Do you disburse your money for public uses? It is lawful, in this sense, to put out our money to use. O let us all remember that we are but stewards; and our Lord and Master will before long say, "give an account of your stewardship!" The greater our estate—the greater our responsibilities; the more our revenues—the more our reckonings. You who have but little in the world—be content. God will expect less from you—where He has sowed more sparingly.

XI. The eleventh motive to contentment is—The EXAMPLE of those who have been eminent for contentment. *Examples* are usually more forcible than *precepts*. *Abraham* being called out to hard service, and such as was against flesh and blood, was content. God bid him offer up his son Isaac. This was great work: Isaac was the son of his old age; the son of his love; the son of the promise; Christ the Messiah was to come from his line, "in Isaac shall your seed be called." So that to offer up Isaac seemed not only to oppose Abraham's reason—but his faith too; for, if Isaac dies, the world, for ought he knew—must be without a Mediator. Besides, if Isaac must be sacrificed, was there no other hand to do it, but Abraham's? Must the *father* needs be the *executioner*? Must he who was the instrument of giving Isaac his being, be the instrument of taking it away? Yet Abraham does not dispute or hesitate—but believes "against hope," and is content with God's prescription: so, when God called him to leave his country, he was content.

Some would have argued thus: "What! leave my friends, my native soil, my prosperous situation, and become a wandering pilgrim?" Abraham is content. Besides, Abraham went blindfold, "He did not know where he was going." God held him in suspense; he must go

wander—he knows not where; and when he does come to the place which God has laid out for him, he knows not what oppositions he shall meet with there. The world seldom casts a favorable aspect upon *strangers*. Yet he is content, and obeys; "he sojourned in the land of promise." (He. 11:9)

Behold a little his **pilgrimage**. First, he goes to Haran, a city in Mesopotamia. When he had sojourned there a while, his father dies. Then he moved to Canaan; there a famine arises; then he went down to Egypt; after that he returns to Canaan. When he comes there, it is true he had a promise—but he found nothing to answer expectation; he had not there one foot of land—but was an exile. In this time of his sojourning he buried his wife; and as for his dwellings, he had no sumptuous buildings—but lived in tents: all this was enough to have broken any man's heart. Abraham might think thus with himself: "is this the land I must possess? here is no probability of any good; all things are against me!" Well, is he discontented? No! God says to him, "Abraham, go, leave your country," and this word was enough to lead him all over the world; he is presently upon his march. Here was a man who had learned to be content.

But let us descend a little lower, to heathen *Zeno*, of who Seneca speaks, who had once been very rich, hearing of a shipwreck, and that all his goods were drowned at sea: "Fortune," says he, (he spoke in a heathen dialect) "has dealt with me, and would have me now study philosophy." He was content to change his course of life, to leave off being a merchant, and turn a philosopher. And if a heathen said thus, shall not a Christian say, when the world is drained from him, "God would have me leave off following the world, and study Christ more, and how to get to heaven!" Do I see an heathen contented, and a Christian disquieted? How did heathens vilify those worldly things, which Christians did magnify? Though they knew not God, or what true happiness meant; yet, they would speak very sublimely of a deity, and of the life to come, and for those elysian delights, which they did but *imagine*—so they undervalued and despised the things here below! It was the doctrine they taught their

scholars, and which some of them practiced, that they should strive to be contented with a little; they were willing to make an exchange, and have less gold—and more learning. And shall not we be content then, to have less of the world—so that we may have more of Christ! May not Christians blush to see the *heathens* content with little of this world—and to see *themselves* so elated with the love of earthly things, that if they begin a little to abate, and their provisions grow short, they murmur, and are like Micah, "You took away the gods I made. What else do I have?" (Judges 18:24) Have heathens gone so far in contentment, and is it not sad for us to be discontent?

These heroes of their time, how did they embrace death itself! Socrates died in prison; Hercules was burnt alive; Cato, who Seneca calls *the portrait of virtue*, was thrust through with a sword; but how bravely, and with contentment of spirit did they die? "Shall I (said Seneca) weep for Cato, or Regulus, or the rest of those worthies, who died with so much valor and patience?" These severe afflictions did not make them alter their countenance—and do I see a Christian appalled and amazed? Death did not affright them—and does it distract us? Did the spring-head of *nature* rise so high? and shall not *grace*, like the waters of the sanctuary, rise higher? We that *pretend* to live by faith—may we not go to school to them who had no other pilot but *reason* to guide them?

Nay, let me come a step lower, to creatures void of reason; we see that every creature is contented with its allowance; the beasts with their provender, the birds with their nests; they live only upon providence. And shall we make ourselves below them? Let a Christian go to school to the ox and the donkey to learn contentedness! We think that we never have enough, and are always storing up. "Look at the *birds* of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Mat. 6:26) It is an motive which Christ brings to make Christians contented with their condition; the birds do not store up—yet they are provided for, and

are contented. But if you are discontented, you are much worse than they are. Let these examples quicken us.

XII. The twelfth motive to contentment is—Whatever affliction or trouble a child of God meets with—it is all the hell he shall ever have! Whatever eclipse may be upon his name or estate—it is a *little cloud* which will soon be blown over—and then his hell is past. Death *begins* a wicked man's hell. Death *ends* a godly man's hell. Think with yourself, "*What is my affliction? It is but a temporary hell. Indeed if all my hell is here on earth--it is but an easy hell. What is the cup of affliction, compared to the cup of damnation!*"

Lazarus could not get a crumb; he was so diseased that the dogs took pity on him, and as if they had been his physicians, licked his sores. But this was an easy hell—the angels quickly fetched him out of it! If all our hell is in this life—and in the midst of this hell we may have the love of God, and then it is no more hell—but paradise! If all our hell is here, we may see to the end of it; it is but skin-deep, it cannot touch the soul. It is a short-lived hell. After a dreary night of affliction, comes the bright morning of glory! Since our lives are short—our trials cannot be long. As our riches take wings and fly away—so do our sufferings. Let us learn to be content, whatever our circumstances.

XIII. The thirteenth motive to contentment is this—To have much of the world, and to lack contentment, is a great judgement. For a man to have a huge stomach, that whatever food you give him—he is still craving and is never satisfied—this is a great judgement upon the man! Likewise, you who are a devourer of money, and yet never have enough—but still cry, "give, give!" this is a sad judgement! "They shall eat, and not have enough." (Ho. 4:10) The throat of a malicious man is an open sepulcher, (Ro. 3:13) so is the heart of a covetous man. *Covetousness is not only a sin—but the punishment of a sin!* It is a secret curse upon a covetous person; he shall thirst, and thirst, and never be satisfied! "Whoever loves money

never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income." (Ec. 5:10) And is not this a curse!

It was a severe judgement upon the people of Judah, "You have food to eat, but not enough to fill you up. You have wine to drink, but not enough to satisfy your thirst." (Haggai 1:6) O let us take heed of this plague! Did not Esau say to his brother, "I have *enough*, my brother," (Gen. 33:9); and shall not a Christian say so much more. It is sad that our hearts should be dead to heavenly things—that they are a sponge to suck in earthly vanities!

All that has been said, should be sufficient to work our minds to heavenly contentment.

Three Cautions

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.**

I. He must not be contented in a NATURAL estate. Here we must learn *not* to be content.

A sinner in his natural state, is **under the wrath of God**, (John 3:16) and shall he be content when that dreadful vial is about to be poured out upon him! Is it nothing to lie forever under the scorchings of divine fury? "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings!"

A sinner, as a sinner, is **under the power of Satan**, (Ac. 26:18) and shall he be content in this dreadful state! Who would be contented to stay in the enemies' quarters? While we sleep in the lap of sin, the devil does to us as the Philistines did to Samson— he 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 contentment. 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 does sin strengthen.** It is hard to get out of sin, when the heart as a garrison is supplied and fortified by sin. A *young* tree is easily removed—but when the tree is once rooted, there is no stirring of it. Just so, you who are rooted in your pride, unbelief, impenitency, it will cost you many a hard pull before you are plucked out of your natural estate! (Jer. 6:16) It is a hard thing to have a *brazen face* and a *broken heart*! "He travails with iniquity;" (Psalm 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 says, "why are you cast down, O my soul?" (Psalm 43:5) But a sinner should say to himself, why are you not disquieted, O my soul? Why is it that you lay *afflictions* so to heart, and can 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!*

II. Though, in regard of externals, a man should be in every estate content—yet **he must not be content is such a condition wherein God is apparently dishonored.** If a man's trade be such that he must trespass upon a command of God, 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 lose some of his gain, so he may lessen some of his guilt. So, for servants who 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 evil example. Joseph, living in Pharaoh's court, had learned to swear "by the life of Pharaoh." (Ge. 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, trod just in his steps, therefore says he, "I beg you to send him to my father's house—because I have five brothers—to warn them, so they won't also come to this place of torment!" (Lu. 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 Ki. 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. We do as we *see* others do before us, especially those who are above us. If the head is 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 Your wrath on the families that don't call on Your name." (Jer. 10:25) For lack 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 scroll, 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." (Ze. 5:4) Is it not of sad consequence to live in a profane family, when the sin

of the master pulls his house about his ears? If the stones and timber be destroyed, how shall the servant escape? And suppose God does not send a *temporal* scroll of curses in the family, there is a *spiritual* scroll, and that is worse. "The Lord's curse is on the household of the wicked!" (Proverbs 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—but the house of the wicked is a little hell.* (Proverbs 7:27) Oh, incorporate yourselves into a pious family; the house of a godly man is perfumed with a blessing. "The Lord's curse is on the household of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous." (Proverbs 3:33) When the holy oil of grace is poured on the head, the savor of this ointment sweetly diffuses itself, and the virtue of it runs down upon the skirts of the family. Pious examples are very magnetic 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 partake of their fragrance.

III. 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. (Ep. 4:15) Where the apostle distinguishes between our *being* in Christ, and our *growing* in him; our *maturing*, and our *flourishing*. Do not be content with a *little piety*.

It is not enough that there is *life*—but there must be *fruit*. Barrenness in the law was accounted a curse: the further we are from the fruit, the nearer we are to cursing. (He. 6:8) It is a sad thing when men are fruitful only in the unfruitful works of darkness. Be not content with a grain or two of grace. "My Father is glorified by this: that you produce *much fruit* and prove to be My disciples." (John 15:8) O covet more grace! never think you have enough. We are bid to covet

the best things. (1 Cor. 12:31) It is a heavenly ambition, when we desire to be high in God's favor. It is a blessed contentment when all the strife is "who shall be most holy". Paul, though he was content with a little of the world—yet not with a little grace. "I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus." (Ph. 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 his grace; he pants and breathes after more. This is his prayer, "Lord, more conformity to Christ, more communion with Christ!" He would sincerely 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 they are called *trees* of righteousness, (Is. 61:3) for their growth. They are indeed like the tree of life, bringing forth several sorts of fruit.

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 colors, and grew so illustrious, that God himself was in love with it, and makes his faith a pattern to all believers.

A true Christian grows in **sweetness**. A poisonous weed may grow as much as the corn; but the one has a harsh sour taste, the other *mellows* as it grows. A 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.

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 has not only oil in his lamp—but his lamp is also burning and shining. Grace is agile and dexterous. Christ's vines flourish; (Ca. 6:11) hence we read of "a lively hope, (1 Pe. 1:3) and "a fervent love;" (1 Pe. 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 vigor, 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 fig-tree put forth her green figs." The fresh gales of the Spirit sweetly revive and nourish 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. (Ca. 6:16)

A true Christian grows both in the **kind** and in the **degree** of grace. To his spiritual living he gets an *augmentation*, "Make every effort to *add* to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Pe. 1:5-8) Here is grace growing in its kind. And he goes on "from faith to faith;" (Ro. 1:17) there is grace growing in the degree; "we are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because your faith grows exceedingly;" (2 Th. 1:3) it increases over and above.

The apostle speaks of those spiritual plants which were laden with gospel-fruit. (Ph. 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 Th. 3:10) A Christian must never be so old as to be past bearing; he brings forth fruit in his old age. (Psalm 92:14) A heaven-born plant is ever growing; he never thinks he grows enough; he is not content unless he adds every day to his spiritual stature. We must not be content just with so much grace as will keep life and soul together, a grain 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. (Is. 40:31) Our *sins* are renewed, our *temptations* are renewed, our *needs* are renewed—and shall not our *strength* be renewed? O be not content with grace in its infancy! You look for degrees of glory, be Christians of high degrees. Though a believer should be contented with a little estate—yet not with a little piety. A Christian of the right breed, labors still to excel himself, and come nearer to that holiness in God, who is the original, the pattern, and prototype of all holiness.

Showing how a Christian may know whether he has learned this Divine Art of Contentment

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 has learned this lesson of contentment? I shall lay down some *characters* by which you shall know it.

1. A contented spirit is SILENT when under afflictions. "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" (Psalm 39:9) Contentment silences all dispute: "he sits alone and keeps silence." (La. 3:28)

There is a *sinful* silence—when God is dishonored, 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 dreadful message from God, "that judgment is coming for his family," (1 Sa. 3:13,14) does Eli murmur or dispute? No! he has not one word to say against God: "It is the Lord's will. Let him do what he thinks best." A discontented spirit says 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 says, as Eli, ""It is the Lord's will. Let him do what he thinks best." When Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had offered up strange fire, and fire went from the Lord and devoured them, (Le. 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 was not fitting for a prophet.

2. A contented spirit is a CHEERFUL spirit. Contentment is something more than patience; for patience denotes only submission, contentment denotes cheerfulness. A contented Christian is more than passive; he does not only *bear* the cross—but *take* up the cross. (Mat. 6:24) He looks upon God as a wise God; and whatever he does, it is in order to a cure. Hence the contented Christian is cheerful, and with the apostle, "I *delight* in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties." (2 Cor. 12:10) He does not only *submit* to God's dealings—but *rejoices* in them! He does not only say, "*just* is the Lord in all that has befallen me," but "*good* is the Lord." This is to be contented. A sullen melancholy is hateful to God. It is said, "God loves a cheerful *giver*," (2 Cor. 9:7) yes and God loves a cheerful *liver*! We are bid in Scripture, "not to be anxious," but we are not bid not to be cheerful. He who is contented with his condition, does not abate of his spiritual joy; and indeed he has that within him which is the ground of cheerfulness; he carries a pardon sealed in his heart! (Mat. 9:2)

3. A contented spirit is a THANKFUL spirit. This is a degree above cheerfulness; "in everything giving thanks." (1 Th. 5:18) A gracious heart spies mercy in *every* condition, therefore has his heart pitched up to thankfulness. Others will bless God for prosperity—but he blesses him for *affliction*. Thus he reasons with himself; am I in need? God sees it better for me to lack than to abound; God is now dieting me, he sees it better for my spiritual health sometimes to be kept fasting; therefore he does 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 sepulcher wherein they are buried.

A contented Christian in the greatest straits, has his heart enlarged and dilated in thankfulness; he often 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 thankful 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 who is content, no condition comes amiss to him; so it is in the text, "in *whatever* condition I am." A Christian should be content in any and every situation; either to lack or abound. The people of Israel knew neither how to abound, nor yet how to lack; when they were in *need* 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 learned to be content whatever the circumstances. If he was in *prosperity*, he knew how to be thankful. If he was in *adversity*, he knew how to be patient; he was neither lifted up with the one, nor cast down with the other.

Thus a contented Christian knows how to respond to any condition. We have those who can be contented in some conditions—but not in

every estate; they can be content in a wealthy estate, when they have the streams of milk and honey; while God's candle shines upon their head—now they are content—but if the wind turns and is 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—if God would allow them to pick and choose. They could be content to bear such a cross of their choosing; they could better endure sickness than poverty; or bear loss of estate than loss of children; if they might have a cross of their own choosing—they would be content. A contented Christian does not go to *choose his cross*—but leaves God to choose for him; he is content both for the *kind* of the affliction and the *duration* of the affliction. A contented spirit says, "let God apply whatever medicine he pleases, and let it lie on as long as it will; I know when it has done its cure, and eaten the venom of sin out of my heart, God will take it away."

In a word, a contented Christian, being sweetly captivated under the authority of the Word, desires to be wholly at God's disposal, and cheerfully lives in whatever circumstances that God has placed him in.

5. He who 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 goes before, he may follow. But when men will not *follow* providence but run *before* it, as he who said, "this evil is of the Lord, why should I wait any longer. (2 Ki. 6:33) If *God* does 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 contentment, this is unbelief broken into rebellion. A contented Christian is willing to wait God's leisure, and will not stir until God opens a door. The contented Christian says, with reverence, "God has cast me into this condition; and though it is sad, and troublesome, yet I will not stir, until God by a clear providence

fetches me out." Thus those brave spirited Christians; "they accepted not deliverance," (He. 11:35) that is, upon base dishonorable 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 honor, and put into offices of trust—yet the honor of Christ was dearer to them, than either liberty or honor." A contented Christian will not remove, until 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." (La. 3:26) It is good to wait God's leisure—and not to extricate ourselves out of trouble—until we see the star of God's providence pointing out a way to us!

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 contentment. Certainly it is feasible, others of God's saints have reached to it. Paul here had it; and what do we think of those we read of, in that little book of martyrs, (Hebrews 11) who had trials of cruel mockings and scourgings, who wandered about in deserts and caves—yet were contented. It is possible to attain to this divine art of contentment. And here I shall lay down some *rules for holy contentment*.

Rule 1. Advance FAITH. All our disquiets issue from unbelief. It is this which raises 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 fancy food and raiment—but having faith, which will make us content. Faith chides

down passion. When *reason* begins to sink—let *faith* swim! **How does faith work contentment?**

1. Faith shows the soul that whatever its trials are—that they are all from the hand of a loving heavenly father. It is indeed a *bitter* cup—but "shall I not drink the cup which *my father* has given me to drink?" Faith shows the soul that whatever its trials are—that they are all sent in love to my soul. God corrects me, with the same love with which he crowns me; God is now training me up for heaven. He is only *polishing* his 'jewels'. These sufferings bring forth patience, humility, even the peaceful fruits of righteousness. (He. 12:11) And if God can bring such sweet fruit out of our stock, let him graft me wherever and however he pleases. Thus faith brings the heart to holy contentment.

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 which grow upon this vine, and faith presses 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*;" (Psalm 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 you live contented lives? Live up to the height of your faith.

Rule 2. Labor for ASSURANCE. O let us get a *saving* interest cleared, between God and our souls! O, if there is an interest worth looking after, it is an interest between God and the soul! Labor to say, "*My God*." To be without money, and without friends, and without God too, is sad. But he whose faith flourishes into assurance, who can say, "*I know whom I have believed!*" (2 Ti. 1:2) that man has enough to give his heart contentment. When a man's debts are paid, and he can go abroad without fear of being arrested, what contentment is this! O, let your title to heaven be cleared! If God is

ours, whatever we lack in the creature, is infinitely made up in him. Do I lack bread? I have Christ, the bread of life. Am I under defilement? his blood is like the trees of the sanctuary; not only for food—but medicine. (Ez. 47:12) If anything in the world be worth laboring for, it is to get sound evidences, that God is ours. If this is once cleared, what can come amiss? No matter what storms I meet with—it is well with me, so long that I know where to put in for harbor. He who has God to be his God, is so well contented with his condition, that he does not much care whether he has anything else.

To rest in a condition where a person cannot say that God is his God, is matter of *fear*. If a person can truly say that God is his God—and yet is not contented—this is a matter of *shame*. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." (1 Sa. 30:6) It was sad with him—his city burnt, his wives taken captive, his all lost, and likely to have lost his soldiers' hearts too, (for they spoke of stoning him,) yet he had the ground of contentment within him; a saving interest in God, and this was a pillar of support to his spirit. He who knows God is his, and all that is in God is for his good—if this does not satisfy him, I know nothing that will.

Rule 3. Get a HUMBLE spirit. The humble man is the contented man; if his estate is low, his heart is lower than his estate, therefore he is content. If his esteem in the world is low—he who is little in his own eyes will not be much troubled to be little in the eyes of others. He has a lower 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:" (Ge. 32:10) and then *a little* will content him! He cries out with Paul, that he is the chief of sinners, (1 Ti. 1:15) therefore does not murmur—but admire. He does not complain that his comforts are small. *He thinks it is mercy, that he is out of hell*, therefore he is contented. He does not go to carve out a more happy condition to himself; he knows that the worst piece which God cuts for him—is better than he deserves.

A proud man is never contented; he is one that has a high opinion of himself; therefore under small blessings, he is disdainful; and under small crosses, he is impatient. The humble spirit is the contented spirit; if his cross is light—he reckons it the inventory of his mercies; if his cross is 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* which is laid up in the *ark of a good conscience!* O take heed of indulging in 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 raises a tempest. If *dust* or *splinters* have 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. Just so, if sin has gotten into the *conscience*, which is as the *eye of the soul*, then grief and disquiet breed there. Keep the *eye of conscience* clear—and all is well. What Solomon says of a good stomach, I may say of a good conscience, "to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet." (Proverbs 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 bitter waters of Marah into sweet wine.

Would you have a quiet heart? Get a smiling conscience. I do not wonder to hear Paul say that he was content in every situation, 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 *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! (Ac. 16:25) Augustine calls contentment, "the *paradise* of a good conscience!" And if it is 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 are 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 anxious thoughts begin to arise, and the heart is disquieted, conscience says to a man, as the king did to Nehemiah, "Why is your countenance sad?" So says conscience, "Have not you the seed of God in you? are not you an heir of the promise? have not you a treasure which can never be plundered? Why is your countenance sad?" O keep conscience clear—and you shall never lack 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. Just 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, and bridle them in. Do two things: *mortify* your desires; *moderate* your delights.

1. Mortify your desires. We must not be of the dragon's temper, which, they say—is so thirsty, that no water will quench its thirst. "Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual sin, impurity, lust, and shameful desires." (Col. 3:5) Our desires, when they are inordinate, are evil. Crucify your desires—be as dead men—a dead man has no appetite!

How should a Christian martyr his desires?

(1.) Get a right judgment of the things here below; they are poor beggarly things. "Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle" (Proverbs 23:4-5) The *appetite* must be guided by *reason*. The *affections* are the feet of the soul; therefore they must follow the *judgment*, not lead it.

(2.) Often seriously meditate of mortality. Death will soon crop these *flowers* which we delight in; and pull down the fabric of our *bodies* which we so garnish and beautify. Think, when you are locking up your money in your chest—that you shall shortly be locked up in your coffin!

2. Moderate your delights. Do not set your heart too much upon any creature comfort. 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 creature lie too near our heart—when God pulls away that comfort—a piece of our heart is torn away with it! Too much *fondness* ends in *frowardness*. Those who would be content in the lack of comforts, must be moderate in the enjoyment of comforts. Jonathan *dipped* the rod in honey—he did not *thrust* it in. Let us take heed of engulfing ourselves in pleasure! It is better have a spare diet, than, by having too much, to glut ourselves.

Rule 6. Get much of HEAVEN into your heart. "You satisfy me more than the richest of foods. (Psalm 63:5) Spiritual things truly satisfy! The more that *heaven* is in us—the less *earth* that will content us. He who has once tasted the love of God, his thirst is much quenched towards earthly things. The joys of God's Spirit are heart-*filling* and heart-*cheering* joys; he who has these, has heaven begun in him! (Ro. 14:27) And shall not we be content to be in heaven? O get a heavenly 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 which flies high in the air, does not fear the stinging of the serpent. The serpent creeps on his belly, and stings only such creatures as creep upon the earth.

Rule 7. Look not so much on the *dark* side of your condition, as on the *bright* side. God chequers his providences, white and black—as the pillar of the cloud had its light side and dark

side. Look on the light side of the estate; who looks on the back side of a landscape? Suppose you have lost much in a law-suit—there is the dark side; yet you have some land left—there is the light side. You have *sickness* in your body—there is the dark side; but you also have *grace* in your soul—there is the light side. You have a *child* taken away—there is the dark side; your *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*. (Ze. 1:1) *Mercies* and *afflictions* are interwoven—God *speckles* his work.

"O," says one, "I lack such a comfort!" But weigh all your mercies in the balance—and that will make you content. If a man lacked 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 dissolve. Do not pore upon your *losses*—but ponder upon your *mercies*. What! Would you have *no afflictions* at all—and only all good things? Would you have no evil *about* you—who has so much evil *in* you? You are not fully *sanctified* in this life—how then think you to be fully *satisfied* in this life? Never look for perfection of *contentment*, until there is 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 Ti. 2:3) A soldier is content with anything. Though he has not his stately house, his rich furniture, his soft bed, his full table—yet he does 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 honor which shall be set upon his head. For hope of this, is he content to run any hazard, and endure any hardship. Would it not be absurd to hear him complain, that he lacks such provision and is discontent to lie out in the fields? A Christian is a military person, he fights the Lord's battles, he is Christ's ensign bearer. Now, what

though he endures hard fate, and the bullets fly about him? He fights for a crown—and therefore must be content!

2. We are in a *nomadic* condition—we are pilgrims and travelers. A man who is in a strange country, is contented with anything. Though he has not that respect or attendance which he looks for at home, nor is capable of the privileges and amenities of that place—he is content. He knows, when he comes into his own country, he has lands to inherit, and there he shall have honor and respect. So it is with a child of God, he is in a pilgrim condition; "I am a stranger with you, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were!" (Psalm 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! (He. 12:22) Therefore, though "he hungers and thirsts, and has 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 anything. A beggar must not pick and choose—he is contented with the *scraps*. Oh, why do you who are a beggar, murmur? Oh, why do you who are fed out of the alms-basket of God's providence, murmur?

Rule 9. Do not let your hope depend upon EXTERNAL things. Do not lean upon *sandy* pillars. We often 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 your contentment go upon *crutches*, which may soon fail. The ground of contentment must be *within* yourself. The Greek word which is used for contentment, signifies self-sufficiency. A Christian has that within him—which 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 yourself, "if *friends* leave me, if *riches* take wings—yet I have that within me, which comforts me—a 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 a saving interest in God, and that interest cannot be broken off!" O never place your felicity in these poor 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.

First. In regard of our MERCIES—we have deserved less. What can we deserve? Can a 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, said, "this is more than I am worthy of!" "I do not give you this," said the king, "because you are *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 to us! We can bring *faggots* to our own burning—but not one *flower* to the garland of our salvation. He who has the least mercy—will die in God's debt!

Secondly. In regard of our AFFLICTIONS—we have deserved more. "you have punished us *less* than our iniquities deserve. (Ex. 9:13) Is our condition sad? We have deserved it should be worse. Has God taken away our *estate* from us? He might have taken away *Christ* from us. Has 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 has a full cup of the choicest wine wrung out to him, another is mingling his drink with tears. How many pale faces do we behold, whom poverty has 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 favor. Am I in prison? Was not Daniel in a worse place—the lion's den! Do I live in a poor cottage? look on those who are banished from their cottages. We read of the primitive saints, "Some were mocked, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in dungeons. Some died by stoning, and some were sawed in half; others were killed with the sword. Some went about in skins of sheep and goats, hungry and oppressed and mistreated." (He. 11:37,38)

Have you a gentle illness? look on those who are tormented with the stone, the gout, cancer etc. Others of God's children have had greater afflictions, and have borne them better than we. Daniel fed only upon vegetables and drank only 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, who have had only bread and water, have 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 condition, when He was upon earth. What a poor, base condition was He pleased to be in for us! He was contented with anything. "For you 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 a house from heaven with him, or taken 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 *eternally rich*! The feeding trough was his cradle, and the cobwebs were his canopy. He who is now preparing mansions for us in heaven—had none for himself on earth, "he had nowhere to lay his head." Christ took upon him the form of a servant. (Ph. 2:7) We do not read that He had any money. When he needed money, he had to work a miracle for it. (Mat. 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 greatest humility! He was content to live poor—and die cursed! O compare your condition with His—and learn to be content!

4. Let us compare our present condition—with what it once WAS—and this will make us content.

First, Let us compare our SPIRITUAL estate with what it was once. What were we—when we lay in our blood? We were heirs to hell, having no right to pluck one leaf from the tree of promise! It was a *Christless* and *hopeless* condition! (Ep. 2:12) But now God has cut off our destiny of hell and damnation. He has taken you out of the wild olive tree of nature—and engrafted you into Christ, making you living branches of that living vine! He has not only caused the light to shine *upon* you—but *into* you, (2 Cor. 6:6) and has made you an heir of all the privileges of divine sonship! Is not this enough to make the soul content.

Secondly, 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 Ti. 6:7) If we have not that which we now desire—we have more than we brought 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, etc. But we brought nothing with us—but sin! What if our condition at present is low? It is better than it was once; therefore, having food and clothing, let us be content. Whatever we have, God's providence fetches 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 I came out of my mother's womb!" (Job 1:21) As if he had said, though God has 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 I came I hither! Therefore blessed be the name of the Lord.

5. Let us compare our present condition—with what it shortly SHALL BE. There is a time shortly coming, when, if we had all the riches of the Indies, they would do us no good—we must die, and can carry nothing with us. So says the apostle, "We didn't bring anything with us when we came into the world—and we certainly cannot carry anything with us when we die!" (1 Ti. 6:7) Therefore it follows, "So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content." Open the rich man's grave—and see what is there—you may find the miser's bones—but not his riches! Were we to live forever here on earth, or could we carry our riches into the eternal world—then indeed we might be discontented, when we look upon our empty money bags. But it is not so; God may presently seal a warrant for death to apprehend us—and when we die, we cannot carry our estate with us! Honor and riches do not descend into the grave—why then are we troubled at our outward condition? Why do we clothe ourselves with discontent? O lay up a stock of grace! Be rich in faith and good works—these riches will follow us! (Re. 14:13) No other coin but grace, will pass current in heaven, silver and gold will not go there. Labor to be rich towards God, (Luke 12:21) and as for other things, be not much concerned—for we shall carry nothing with us into the eternal world!

Rule 11. Do 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 heart lower! It is not by making his *barns* wider—but his *heart* narrower. A whole kingdom will not content one man; another man is satisfied with a poor hut. What is the difference? The one tries to

satisfy his lusts—the other his necessity. The one thinks what he may yet obtain—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 earthly things—for they have *vanity* written upon their frontispiece. The world is like a *shadow* which declines. The world is delightful—but deceitful. The world promises more than it has—and it fails us when we have most need of it. All the world rings '*change*', and is constant only in its *disappointments!* What then, if we have less of that which is at best but uncertain and changing? The world is as full of change—as of motion; so what if God cut us short in these passing vanities? The more a man has to do with the *world*—the more he has to do with *vanity!* The world may be compared to **ice**, which is smooth—but slippery! The world may also be compared to the Egyptian temples—very beautiful and sumptuous on the outside—but within nothing to be seen but the image of an ape! Every creature says concerning satisfaction, "it is not in me!" The world is not a *filling* comfort—but a *flying* comfort. The world 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, that which they cannot give? "Jonah was exceeding glad of the *gourd*." (Jon. 4:6) What a vanity was that! Is it much to see a *gourd* smitten and withering?

Rule 13. Get the 'imagination' regulated. It is the 'imagination' which raises the price of things, above their real worth. What is the reason one flower is worth five dollars—and another perhaps not worth one penny? 'Imagination' raises the price—the difference is rather *imaginary* than *real*. Just so, the reason why it is better to have thousands than hundreds is—because men 'imagine' it so! If we could 'imagine' a lower condition to be better—as having less worry in it, and less accounting to give for it—it would be far more prized. The water from a paper cup, tastes as sweet as if it came out a golden chalice. Things are as we 'imagine' them. Ever since the fall, the 'imagine' is distempered; "God saw that the *imagination* of the

thoughts of his heart, was only **evil** all the time." (Ge. 6:5) 'Imagination' looks at things through a 'magnifying glass'. Pray that God will *sanctify* your 'imagination'; a lower condition would content you, if the mind and 'imagination' were set right. Diogenes preferred his solitary life before Alexander's royalty. Fabricius was a poor man—yet despised the gold of King Pyrrhus. Could we cure our distempered 'imagination'—we would soon conquer our discontented heart!

Rule 14. Consider how little will suffice nature. The body is but a small thing—and is easily nourished. Christ has taught us to pray for our *daily bread*. Nature is content with a little. Not to thirst, not to starve—is enough. "Having food and clothing, 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 humor.

Rule 15. Believe that the present condition is best for us. The flesh is not a competent judge. Gluttons are for rich banquets—but a man who regards his health, is rather for solid food. Vain men imagine that a prosperous condition is best for them; whereas a wise Christian has his will melted into God's will, and thinks it best to be at God's will. God is wise—he knows best what we need; and if we could acquiesce in His providential dealings with us—the quarrel would soon be at an end. O what a strange creature would man be—if he were what he could wish himself to be! Be content to be at God's allowance. God knows which is the *fittest pasture* to put his sheep in; sometimes a more sparse ground does well—whereas a lush pasture may rot. Do I meet with such a cross? By it, God shows me what the world is; he has no better way to wean me. Does God stint me in my temporals? 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 parcels out to us, we would cheerfully submit, and say, "the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places."

Rule 16. Do not too much indulge 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 our flesh? The flesh puts us upon the immoderate pursuit of the world. The flesh hunts for *ease* and *luxury*—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; but in secular things, it is a horse-leech, crying "give, give!" The flesh is an enemy to suffering: it will never make a man a martyr. O keep it under control! Put its neck under Christ's yoke, stretch and nail it to his cross! Never let a Christian look for *contentment* in his spirit—until there is *confinement* in his flesh.

Rule 17. Meditate much on the glory which shall be revealed. There are great things laid up in heaven. Though things are sad for the present—yet let us be content in that it shortly will be better; it is but a short while—and we shall be with Christ, bathing ourselves in the fountain of love! We shall more never complain of needs and injuries! Our cross may now 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. "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (1 Cor. 10:13)

2. After 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 content—the scene will soon alter; God will before long, turn out *water* into *wine*—the hope of this is enough to drive away all distempers from the heart. Blessed be God—it will shortly be better! "We have no continuing city here," therefore our afflictions cannot continue. A wise man always looks to the end of a matter; "The end of the just man is peace." (Psalm 37:37) Methinks

the smoothness of the end—should make amends for the ruggedness of the way. O eternity, eternity! Think often of the eternal kingdom prepared. David was advanced from the *field*—to the *throne*! First he held his *shepherd's staff*—and shortly after the *royal scepter*. God's people may be put to hard services here on earth—but God has 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!" (Ja. 5:14) Just so, is any man discontented? let him pray. Prayer gives vent: the opening of a vein lets out bad blood. Just so, 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 a *holy charm*, to drive away trouble. Prayer is the unbosoming of the soul—the unloading of all our cares into 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 greatly eased and quieted. It is not our strong *resolutions*—but our strong *requests* 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 lack and abound, and "do all things;" yet it was through Christ strengthening him. (Ph. 4:13)

Consolation to the Contented Christian.

The last use is of *comfort*—an *encouraging word to the contented Christian*. If there is an heaven upon earth—you have it! O Christian! You may leap over your troubles, and, with the leviathan, laugh at the shaking of a spear. (Job 41:7) You are a crown to your profession;

you hold it out to all the world—that there is virtue enough in piety, to give the soul contentment. You show the highest degree of grace. When grace is reigning in our hearts, it is easy for us to be content. But when grace is declining, and meets with crosses, temptations, agonies; now the heart becomes discontent.

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

1. God is exceedingly pleased with such a frame of heart.

God says of a contented Christian, as David once said of Goliath's sword, "there is none like that, give it to me!" If you would please God, and be men whom he delights in—be contented. God hates a froward spirit.

2. The contented Christian shall be no loser. What did Job lose, by his patience? God gave him twice as much as he had before. What did Abraham lose, 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 changes his name; no more Abram—but Abraham, *the father of many nations*. (Ge. 17) God makes his seed as the stars of heaven; nay, honors, him with this title, "the father of the faithful." (Ge. 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 of glory!

God will be sure to reward the contented Christian. As our Savior said in another case, to Nathaniel, "You shall see greater things than these!" (John 1:50) So I say, are you contented, O Christian, with a little? You shall see greater things than these! God will distill the sweet influences of his love into your soul. He will bless the oil in your cruise; and when that is done, He will crown you with an eternal enjoyment of himself! He will give you heaven—where you shall have as much contentment as your soul can possibly thirst after!