



DAY 10: Conference

RULES FOR THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS WEEK 1, PART II [321-324]

Why “Rules” for Discernment?

Saint Ignatius gives the rules because they are meant to be principles by which we can scrutinize the different spiritual movements in our soul in order to find out *who* is behind them, and thus know whether to permit & follow them or to reject and fight against. See what St. Ignatius himself writes:

[313] “Rules for understanding to some extent the different movements produced in the soul and for recognizing those that are good to admit them, and those that are bad, to reject them. These rules are more suited to the first week.”

Brief Review of Part 1

[314] If we are souls who are accustomed to sin, committing one mortal sin after another, then the devil (bad/evil spirit) is going to make an effort to keep us there by proposing “*sensual delights and gratifications*”, while the good spirit is going to do the opposite: propose with reason, the unreasonableness of our actions and sting our conscience and lead to remorse.

[315] Those who make an effort to avoid mortal sin and even venial sins, the evil spirit will harass with anxiety, unfounded fears, sadness, and raise obstacles...he knows he can't propose an outright sin...he has to improvise. THE GOOD spirit, will encourage, strengthen, console, grant tears, inspirations and peace, removing obstacles.

[316] Spiritual Consolation: “when an interior movement is aroused in the soul, by which it is inflamed with love of its Creator and Lord”... we are moved to an increase in hope, faith, and charity.

[317] SPIRITUAL DESOLATION. the complete opposite of what is described in the third rule. It is characterized by a darkening of the soul, turmoil of the spirit, an inclination towards the base and earthly, and restlessness arising from numerous disturbances and temptations that lead to a lack of faith, hope, and love.

[318] In time of desolation we should never make a change, but remain firm and constant.

[319] It will be very advantageous to intensify our activity against the desolation—*Agere contra*.

Part II of Week 1

The Eighth Rule

[321] *“When one is in desolation, he should strive to persevere in patience. This reacts against the vexations that have overtaken him. Let him consider, too, that consolation will soon return, and in the meantime, he must diligently use the means against desolation which have been given in the sixth rule.”*

This is self-evident, for desolation is no easy trial. It is one of the most painful crises of the soul. Therefore, nothing remains but to **labor in patience**, making use of all the remedies Saint Ignatius has handed on to us. With my own strength, I cannot recover consolation.

In desolation, the evil spirit often whispers a thought like this: *“Nothing will ever change; you will remain like this forever.”* This is what he once suggested to Saint Ignatius at Manresa, when Ignatius was undertaking severe penances and long hours of prayer, having left the world behind and suffering mockery as a fool. The demon said to him: *“How will you persevere for the seventy years of life that remain to you?”*

The enemy wants us to believe that what we feel now will endure forever—or at least for a very long time. But Ignatius, helped by a divine inspiration, answered him: **“And you—can you promise me even one hour of life?”**

Thus Saint Ignatius tells us: **“Let him think that he will soon be consoled.”** The Lord will come at the hour He knows to be most fitting; that timing does not belong to me. I have sins to purge, virtues to be born or strengthened, and desolation is a privileged field for such labor. In His goodness, the Lord gives me this **field of battle** so that I may exercise myself; but He will never test me beyond my strength. I must hold fast in certainty that the Lord will return with consolation.

The Ninth Rule

[322] *There are three principal reasons why we find ourselves in desolation. The first is because we have grown tepid, slothful, or negligent in our spiritual exercises, and so through our own faults spiritual consolation withdraws from us.*

The second is because God wishes to try us, to measure how much we are worth and how far we will extend ourselves in His service and praise, without such payment of consolations and increased graces.

The third is to give us true understanding and interior knowledge, so that we may feel deeply that it is not within our power to obtain or retain high devotion, intense love, tears, or any other spiritual consolation, but that all is gift and grace of God our Lord; and thus that we may not make our nest in what belongs to Another—lifting our understanding in pride or vainglory, attributing to ourselves devotion or any other part of spiritual consolation.

The First Cause: My Own Fault

The first cause of my desolation is my own negligence—my tepidity, my sloth, my failure to persevere. When I examine the roots of my desolation, if I find that I have turned aside from the practices I had promised the Lord; if I have left aside virtues I meant to cultivate; if I have reclaimed attachments I had renounced—then there lies the cause of my desolation.

The solution is straightforward: I must return to what I had offered the Lord. Doing so, the desolation will pass.

The Second Cause: God Tests the Purity of My Intention

Often, however, one examines oneself and says: “*I see no change in my interior life; I do not see negligence or tepidity—and yet I feel this sadness and desolation.*” In such a case Saint Ignatius says:

The second cause is this: **God tests us**, to see how far we will go in His service when there is no immediate payment of consolation.

He desires to know whether I seek **His consolations**, or **Him**. Therefore He visits me with desolation to test whether I will serve Him, love Him, give Him glory, even when He does not pay me “in cash.”

The only way God can prove the purity of my intention is to withdraw the benefit. As long as consolation is present, our egoism risks seeking **the gifts of God** rather than the **God of the gifts**.

The Third Cause: Humility and True Knowledge

The third cause, says Saint Ignatius, is to **give us true knowledge** that spiritual consolation is not ours, nor within our power. When I am desolated, I experience clearly that consolation does not arise from me; for no matter what I do, I cannot retain it.

Saint Teresa notes that her nuns, having received even a little consolation, sometimes do not want to move from their seats, as though remaining perfectly still could preserve it—like something they could hold fast with their hands.

Because we are prone to vanity and self-esteem, when we are consoled we may imagine the consolation comes from our goodness or some virtue in us. Therefore the Lord withdraws consolation, to show plainly that it is **not ours**, and so that we may not steal glory from Him.



“That we may not build our nest in what belongs to Another.” He strips us of false attribution, lest we claim as our own what belongs to God alone.

The Tenth & Eleventh Rules

[323] 10. *When one enjoys consolation, let him consider how he will conduct himself during the time of ensuing desolation, and store up a supply of strength as defense against that day.*

[324] 11. *He who enjoys consolation should take care to humble himself and lower himself as much as possible. Let him recall how little he is able to do in time of desolation, when he is left without such grace or consolation.*

On the other hand, one who suffers desolation should remember that by making use of the sufficient grace offered him, he can do much to withstand all his enemies. Let him find his strength in his Creator and Lord.