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ON DIVINE MEDITATION

William Bates



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Preface

O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day. - PSALM
119:97

THE Book of Psalms is entitled by Calvin, 'The Anatomy of the Soul,' wherein all its inward workings are made visible. In this text we have the working of David's affection, and the motion of his understanding represented to us. Here is the working of his affection, "Oh how love I thy law!" Here is the motion of his understanding, "it is my meditation all the day." Constant love produceth continual meditation on God's law. I intend to fix my discourse upon the latter part, concerning the meditation of David; and I suppose this may be one reason for which he is entitled, "a man after God's own heart," because of the heavenly frame and temper of his spirit.

David was always ascending to God, and descending upon himself; to endear God to his soul, and to engage his soul to God. "When I awake (saith he) I am still with thee." Psal. 139:8.

In the discussing of which duty of meditation, I shall use this method.

I. Explain the nature and kinds of it.

II. Show the necessity of it.

III. The time wherein this duty is to be practised.

IV. Those admirable advantages which it brings to the soul.

V. Lay down those rules whereby you may manage it the more cheerfully and successfully.

Chapter I: Of the Nature of Meditation.

It is speculative or practical. The latter described, and the description opened. Occasional meditation. The sin of neglecting it, and the advantage of performing it. Deliberate meditation: which is either direct or reflective.

I. MEDITATION is a duty so rare and unpractised, that I think the knowledge of it is not among all christians, the exercise of it is among very few; and therefore if I should tell you that it is an unaccustomed duty, this might be an imperfect account of it.

In the general. Meditation is the vehement motion of the understanding, for that is the leading faculty in this duty. And that I may the more fully explain it to you, I will consider its kinds: it is either speculative, or practical.

1. Speculative meditation is this: when there is a serious inquiry made after some hidden truth, when the soul purposeth to enrich itself with the treasures of knowledge; and this is practised by many rational men; I mean those, whose understandings are more refined and raised than ordinary people's. But if our meditation be merely speculative, it is but like a winter sun, which shines but doth not warm. This therefore I shall not speak of.

2. Practical meditation. The end whereof is to bring the soul to a serious detestation of sin, to a closing with, and embracing of the will of God: this is that I intend to treat of, and it is like blowing of the coals to warm the soul. Which I shall describe to you in this manner.

Meditation, is the serious exercise of the understanding, whereby our thoughts are fixed on the observation of spiritual things in order to practice.

i. Then here is the act, it is the serious exercise of the understanding. And in this respect, meditation is an inward secret duty; the soul retires itself into its closet, and bids farewell to the world. It is an invisible duty to the eye of men; and therefore carnal persons do not relish it: it is an exercise of the understanding; it is that duty wherein

we do not converse with drossy outward things. And this is another reason that renders it so difficult to the men of the world. You may observe this as a rule, that every duty the more spiritual it is, the more carnal men disrelish it; and therefore they will rather hear the word than pray in their families; and rather pray than meditate; and what is the reason? Because meditation is a more spiritual duty. Nay further, because it is an exercise of the understanding, therefore it is one of the most noble works that a christian can perform; reason is then in its exaltation. When the soul doth meditate, it doth put forth the most rational acts, and then is the soul most like to God; for God spends an eternity in contemplating his own essence and attributes. That is the act.

ii. The quality of this act, whereby the thoughts are fixed. There is a great inconsistency in the thoughts of men; but meditation doth chain and fasten them to a spiritual object. The soul then lays a command upon itself, that the thoughts (which otherwise are very fleeting and feathery) should be fixed upon its object.

This duty upon this very account is very advantageous: you know a garden that is watered by sudden showers, is more uncertain in its fruit, than when it is refreshed by a constant stream; so when our thoughts are sometimes upon good things, and then run off; when they do but take a glance (as it were) upon holy objects, and then run away; there is not such fruit brought into the soul as when our minds by meditation do dwell upon them. The rays of the sun may warm us, but they do not inflame unless they are contracted in a burning glass; so some slight thoughts of heavenly things may warm us a little, but will never inflame the soul, till they be fixed by close meditation. Therefore David (who was an excellent man at this duty) tells us, Psal. 112:7. his heart was fixed, and saith the same concerning the frame of a good man.

iii. Consider the object of this meditation; our thoughts are fixed on the observation of spiritual things: all spiritual truths are symbolical to a gracious heart, and will yield some advantage to the soul; but

there are some particular truths which may be of more usefulness. To instance in two or three. Meditation fixeth itself upon the joy and glory of heaven, that so the soul may aspire and breathe after it; it fixeth itself upon the defiling nature of sin, that so the soul may for ever renounce and abhor it; it fixeth itself upon the never dying worm and fire of hell, that a christian may always labour to eschew it, and run from it. Such objects as these the meditation of a christian is fixed upon.

iv. Consider the end of meditation. It is in order to practice. There are many persons that fly over a garden of flowers, (I mean over many spiritual objects) their thoughts run and they gather no honey, they bring no fruit to their souls; but this is not the way of a christian; and therefore spiritual meditation is thus described by God himself. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein." Josh. 1:8. The end of it is to observe for practice and use. So in the Book of Job we have an expression applicable to this purpose; "lo this, we have searched it; so it is, hear it, and know thou it for thy good." Job. 5:27. Some know things that they may know them, and some know things that they may be known, and taken notice of; but spiritual meditation draws forth the strength of an object for a man's own good. Now this practical meditation, is either occasional or deliberate.

1. Occasional meditation, that is, when the soul spiritualizeth every object, when the understanding is like a limbec that distils something from every thing it sees and views for the good of the soul. This is that spiritual chemistry that turns all metals into gold. Our blessed Saviour was a most eminent example of this, he drew spiritual matter from natural objects; the gospel is full of parables upon this account.

A christian should labour to see all things in God, and God in all things. Every stream should lead him to the fountain. All things here below should be but a ladder to raise up his soul to God. I shall speak more of this occasional meditation, because it is of great use, and he

that neglects it 1. Reflects dishonour upon God. 2. Is injurious to his own soul. 3. Doth neglect the creature. I speak now of those meditations that may be raised by those variety of objects before us.

(1.) He doth reflect dishonour upon God. The end of the creature is this, that God may have and receive a tribute of honour and praise; and therefore God hath infused a reasonable soul into the body of man, that so man might be a considering creature, whereby he hath fitted man for meditation: this duty doth oblige all rational beings. See Job 38:7. Where the Lord speaks concerning the work of creation, when "the morning stars sang together." As birds sing at the break of day, so in the morning of the creation the angels sang together; and God expects it from man, because he hath given him a reasonable soul. Our five senses are so many doors whereby the external objects are conveyed to us, and the soul is to take notice of them. Nay for this very end did God create man in the last day of the creation, when he had made a feast he brought man as the guest, and when he had provided a palace, he produced man to dwell in it; and what is the reason, but this, that he might glorify the Creator? When God had adorned the heavens with stars, and the earth with flowers; then he brought forth man to give him the praise of all. The first sabbath was instituted for this end, that men might solemnly bless God for the creation of the world.

(2.) He that doth not meditate occasionally injures his own soul. He that makes use of the creatures, and doth not learn by them, robs himself of the best part of that which he should, enjoy of them. The creatures are but the adumbrations of the infinite majesty that is above. Now will any man content himself with painted meat for food? So wilt thou content thyself with the bare enjoyment of the creature; and not ascend up to God? He hath given thee the creatures upon this account, that they might be instruments to raise up thy soul to himself.

(3.) He neglects the creature. There is nothing within the whole circuit of nature, but is of some use to raise up our souls to God.

From the sun, to the stone; from the cedar, to the violet; every creature hath a voice to teach us something of God. This whole world is a school for man. All the creatures spell this to us, that there is a God. Now if we neglect this use of it, by our meditation, then we neglect the creature. The whole creation is a well tuned instrument, and man is to make the music; and if we do not by meditation raise up our thoughts to God, we are in the fault. I will not pass it over without reckoning what advantages the soul may get by it.

1st. This will dispose and fit the soul for admiration and praise of God. What is the reason that men do rather wonder at the effects of art, than at the works of God in nature? but this, because they do not meditate upon them? So that many persons set God beneath a painter or carver. Praise and admiration is the going forth of the understanding upon an excellent object. Now when you shall read the book of the creation, you will have reason to praise the Author of it. When you cast your eyes upward and consider the sun, O meditate and take notice of this, that bright sun is but a shadow of God! It is God that hath stretched forth that rich canopy over our heads. When you cast your eye down, and consider the vast body of the earth, it hangs in the air, which is so weak a thing that it cannot hold up a feather, it is founded upon the power of God. When you consider the vast collection of waters in the sea, that such a raging element should be bounded with the sand, which is the weakest thing; how should this teach us likewise to admire his power! He that will but converse with the creatures thus by way of meditation, will learn to admire the unsearchable wisdom, the unspeakable goodness, and the infinite power of God.

2dly. As it will dispose the soul for praise, so for thanksgiving. Now this differs from praise thus; when I praise a thing, I respect the worth of it; when I am thankful for a thing, I respect my interest in it. Now when a man shall consider this great world, and all things here below were made for the glory of God, and the use of man, this will raise our thanksgiving to God, and inflame our love to him. What is the reason that we are more grateful for small courtesies of men,

than for the rich benefits of God? But because we do not meditate on them.

3dly. This occasional meditation upon the creature without us, will be an excellent ground for our faith and dependance upon God. Our Lord Jesus doth urge his disciples to believe upon this account. Saith he, "do you not see the lilies, they neither sow nor spin, yet they are clothed with a richer garment than Solomon? Do you not see the sparrows? there is not one of them falls to the ground without a providence, and you are of more worth than many sparrows." Matt. 6:26. When a christian shall consider thus; God is the great master of the family of heaven and earth, he makes provision for all his creatures; and if my God takes care of these things that are inferior to me, much more will he take care of me; for it is Christ's argument, "ye are of more value than many sparrows." Nay,

4ly. This occasional meditation, will be a means to cure the most vicious part of our lives; for what is the wickedest part of a man's life? it is his vain thoughts. As in nature there is no vacuity or emptiness, but a vessel is either filled with liquor or the air; now the more water you pour in, the more air goes out. So if you would but store your souls with these occasional meditations, it would thrust out vain and vile thoughts. Oh it is a rare temper when a christian is always upon the wing. When he is like the beams of the sun, they touch the earth, but the body of the sun is fixed in heaven. So it is with a christian when he converseth with the world, but enjoys God.

5ly. This occasional meditation will enliven thy obedience to God. When thou considerest thus with thyself, that thou art always maintained by the expences of his providence, this will encourage thee in his service. A master looks for the service of him he feeds and maintains; so if you consider you are always supported by the charges of free grace, and every good thing given, is the fruit of God's bounty; nay, that all the creatures observe God by a perpetual law, this will likewise raise thy obedience to him.

The sun always runs his course, without error or alteration. All the creatures here below will contradict their own proper nature to be subservient to the will of God, such meditations as these will enliven your obedience. To sum up all: occasional meditation brings this advantage to us, the world, which is the house of man, is made the temple of God. And then are all the creatures used according to the design and end of God, for which they were created, when all these beams of goodness which shine from the Father of lights, are reflected upon him again.

2. There is deliberate meditation, and that is two-fold: it is either direct or reflexive.

(1.) Direct. When the understanding fixeth itself upon some truth, and draws from it those advantages which may be proper to itself. We read of Isaac, that "he went out into the field to meditate." Gen. 24:3. The word in its primitive signification hath this import; that he went forth to confer with truth; when there is a mutual and reciprocal discourse between truth and the soul, when the soul meditates upon the law of God, takes the command of God, and speaks to it, and the command speaks to the soul, there is a mutual conference. Therefore it is said, "the law shall talk with thee," Prov. 6:22. it shall give thee direction how to manage the course of thy life.

(2.) Reflexive meditation; and that is, when there is a solemn discourse between the soul of man, and himself; when there is a colloquy or soliloquy, an inward conference between a man and his own heart, and he inquires how the state and case stands in reference to himself, whether or no reconciled to God? and puts, practical questions concerning his everlasting state.

Chapter II: Of the Necessity of Meditation.

Deliberate meditation commanded. Hinderances of it, disability, multitude of business, laziness, and sensual pleasures; reflected on. The duty pressed.

II. I Come now to the second head, the necessity of this deliberate meditation. It is not of arbitrary concernment, but it is necessary, God commands it; saith he to Joshua, "thou shalt meditate in the law day and night, that thou mayest observe to do, according to all that is written therein." Josh. 1:8. Joshua was a prince of Israel, had numerous employments, and yet notwithstanding such multiplicity of business, saith God to him, "thou shalt meditate." And Hag. 1:5. "thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways." It is a duty which falls under an absolute command, and this command of God cuts off all the vain pleas of carnal men, and all those hinderances which take them off from this duty. There are four I shall name, all cut off by this command of God.

i. Some pretend their unfitness for this duty; they want both temper and matter; they cannot confine their thoughts to an object, and there is such a barrenness in their souls, they have not spiritual objects to discourse upon. For answer, consider,

1. That man's disability doth not give him an exemption from duty. If you have lost your power, yet God hath not lost his right. He commands you to do it, and will this be a sufficient plea at the last day to say, you cannot do it?

2. This unfitness of thine proceeds from a corruptedness of spirit. Thy heart is carnal and sensual, and therefore thou canst not meditate on spiritual things. If there were but love in thy soul, that would nail thy heart to holy objects. "Oh how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (saith David in the text.) Dost thou think one sin shall excuse another? You cannot meditate, what is the reason? because you have carnal hearts. Nay,

3. This argues thou hast been guilty of the neglect of this duty; thou art unfit because thou hast neglected it. We may see in nature, those beasts that are very fierce, yet are tamed by custom, and manageable by use. A little child will lead a beast when he hath been used to it; so thy thoughts which are very fleeting and unruly, yet if thou didst use to call them to an account, if thou didst issue out a command, and wast resolved to serve God in this duty, this would bring thy thoughts to a consistency.

ii. (And this is the common objection against this and all other duties) Multitude of business. There are many who will tell you, that they are so harassed by the employments of this world, that they cannot spend time in this duty solemnly, and seriously. But to answer.

1. Consider, that the duties of religion, are not slight matters, to be performed in an idle hour. Shall those things which are the special acts of thy life, give way to thy worldly occasions? Suppose you should hear a husbandman say thus, I have so much business that I can neither plow nor sow, would you not look upon that man as mad? and doth it not argue a greater madness, for a man to say thus; I have so many employments that I cannot mind, or meditate upon those things which relate to eternity? I told you before, that a prince cannot plead dismissal from this duty, although his employments are very numerous. Nay,

2. A multitude of business is so far from dismissing thee from this duty, that it should rather excite thee to it. For argue thus, if my affairs be many and various, I have more need to meditate upon the law of God, that so I may behave myself therein with a clear and cheerful conscience; and therefore pretend not this, for this will never avail thee at the last day.

iii. Much less can spiritual laziness, give us an exemption from this duty; and this (in truth) is the great cause why men do not perform it. Vain men lie upon the bed of security, as if grace would drop out

of the clouds; as if glory were the fruit of a few verbal prayers; this is the temper of worldly men, but this will never Excuse you from this duty. If you do but consider that heaven itself is the reward of the victorious, "the violent take it by force." Matt. 11:12. If the duty require sweat and pains, remember that there is a crown which is promised as the reward of it. "Blessed is the man who meditates in the law of the Lord;" Psal. 1:1, 2. there is a blessed eternity that shall be his portion; and consider this, how many of the world spend the flower of their time, the vigour of their affections, the strength of their bodies, and all in the service of sin; they toil like horses in the service of sin; and shall they spend more of their strength and time in that work which is the worst drudgery, and when their wages is eternal death, than you will do in the work of God?

iv. Sensual pleasure is another hinderance of this duty; the pleasures of the world discompose our souls, and unfit our bodies for the duties of meditation. A voluptuous man is like water, which is a fluid element, and frequent in motion; who can set a seal upon water? Now when thy soul is drenched in pleasures, it is made fluid, and always moving and running, from one thing to another, and this unfits thee. Oh remember this, the sweetness of religion is incomparably more than all the pleasures of sense. If a christian would but experience this duty of meditation, and observe what a rich income both of grace and joy it produceth to his soul, I should need no argument to press it upon him.

You have heard the nature of meditation, that it is a duty obliging all of us; Oh that I could persuade you to a serious and conscientious exercise of it: Oh that every day you would consecrate some time to meditate on the word. It is an expression of Bellarmine before his book. The Ascent of the Mind to God; writing to a great man, he tells him, 'the pretence of outward employments and the like, cannot excuse him from this duty; for no man can say thus, I have so much business that I cannot eat or sleep; much more let thy soul (which is the better part) have some nourishment every day.' Be frequent in occasional meditation, and raise up thy soul to God by it, and

remember the scripture is a comment upon the book of the creature. And set apart some time for solemn meditation. What is the reason the ordinances are so unsuccessful? but because men do not meditate. Why do we make such slow progress in the way of christianity, and our souls drive like Pharaoh's chariots without wheels? but because we do not meditate. Why are we so frequently vanquished by sin? but for want of meditation.

The great reason why some draw back, and others make no swifter progress, is this, because they are not seriously and constantly and conscientiously every day doing something in this duty.

Chapter III: Of the Time for Meditation.

The frequency of it; urged by two motives. The continuance of it. Morning, evening, night, and the sabbath day, the most proper seasons for it.

III. THE time for this duty; and there are three things I shall open to you in reference to that; the frequency of it; the continuance; the seasons when we may most for the advantage of our souls draw forth our meditations.

i. For the frequency.

In the general you must know, the scripture doth not positively determine any set times wherein we are obliged to meditate.

Spiritual prudence and holy affections should give rules to us for the frequency of meditation. The scripture speaks in general terms, David tells us of a godly man, that he "meditates in the law day and night." Psal. 1:2. Col. 4:2. Eph. 6:18. And as for his own practice, although he had the business of a kingdom, and the pleasure of the court to divert him, yet saith he, it is my meditation "all the day,"

which implies the constant disposition of his soul to this duty, and likewise that ordinarily he was wont to set apart some portion of every day for the performance of it. There are two things which should persuade you to frequency in it.

1. By frequency, you will make your thoughts more pliable for the discharge of this duty. Your souls will be more accomplished and fitted for the exercise of it. You know that customary running makes a person long breasted. So when we often use ourselves to this duty, our thoughts will be more consistent, and we shall be more improved and ripened for the exercise of it. Whereas he that long neglects it, will find that meditation first is unpleasant, then unnecessary, at last burthensome and odious; and this proceeds from disuse.

2. Long interruptions of it will hinder the fruit of it. When there are large gaps and strides between our performance of this duty, we lose the benefit of our former meditations. As it is with our bodies, if a man makes a free, and liberal meal, this will not maintain his body to morrow, and a day after, but he must have constant food, else nature languishes and decays; so you meditate to day, but if you should neglect it for many days after, you will lose the benefit of it, and the soul decays and languishes. If the bird leaves her nest for a long space, the eggs chill and are not fit for production; but when there is a constant incubation, then they bring forth: so when we leave religious duties for a long space, our affections chill, and grow cold; and are not fit to produce holiness, and comfort to our souls; but when we are constant in this work, then shall we find the advantage of it;

ii. For the continuance of this duty, how long must we continue in it?

I answer, so long ordinarily till thou dost find some sensible benefit conveyed to thy soul. The nature of man doth much disrelish this duty, and we are apt to be soon weary of it; our thoughts are like a bird in the cage, which flutters the more because of its confinement; so our thoughts are apt to run strayingly out, when we confine them

to such a duty as this is; but he that begins and doth not proceed, loses the benefit of the duty. As it is in the kindling of a fire in wet wood, you know continuance is that which must cause the flame. When you blow at first, there is a little smoke arises, by holding on you raise sparks, but he that goes forward at last brings it to a flame. So it is in the duty of meditation; when you begin to meditate upon spiritual things, at first you raise a smoke a few sighs towards God; by continuance you raise some sparks of heavenly desires; but at last there is a flame of holy affections that goes up towards God. Now you should not ordinarily leave the work till the flame doth so ascend. When a man goes forth in a calm and serene evening, and views the face of the heavens, he shall first see a star or two twinkle and peep forth; but if he continues, both their number and lustre is increased, and at last he sees the whole heaven is bespangled with stars in every part; so when thou dost meditate upon the promises of the gospel; at first it may be one star begins to appear, a little light conveys itself to thy heart; but go forwards and then thou wilt find when thy thoughts are amplified and ripened, there will be a clear light, more satisfaction conveyed to thy soul; and in continuance the covenant of grace, will appear bespangled with promises as heaven with stars, and all to give thee satisfaction.

iii. For the seasons of meditation.

To that I answer, there is no time in itself but is alike pleasing to God, and there are no hours that are amiss to a gracious spirit. Yet nevertheless there are some particular seasons, wherein our affections are more smart and vigorous, wherein our thoughts are more lively, and more disposed for this duty and contemplation. Now we should choose these seasons. I will instance in some seasons which the scripture speaks of.

1. The morning, after the body hath been composed by the sweetness of rest, then is a fit time for meditation, and there is a double reason for it.

(1.) Because we should consecrate the firstfruits to God. We should pitch our virgin thoughts upon him, and upon spiritual things, before they are opened to the embracements of inferior objects. When you awake in the morning you have many suitors that attend your thoughts. Now have a care that it be not with you as it was in the inn of Bethlehem; strangers took up the rooms in the inn, and Christ was excluded, and put to a manger. So in the morning, vain worldly thoughts take up the room of your souls, but God and Christ are excluded. We should honour the Lord with the first of our substance, and with the first of our thoughts and affections.

(2.) In the morning meditate upon this account, because the influence of the duty will be visible in your lives in the succeeding parts of the day. That wherewith a vessel is first seasoned conveys a lasting savour and tincture to it. So holy meditation, leaves an abiding tincture upon our hearts all the day. It is an excellent expression of Solomon (speaking of the law of God) "When thou awakest it shall talk with thee." Prov. 6:22. What is the meaning? As servants come to their masters in the morning, and receive rules from them, how they shall direct their business in the day: so a gracious heart takes directions from the law of God, in the morning how he should manage himself all the following parts of the day. Gen. 24:63.

2. Another season for meditation, is the evening. For this we have the example of Isaac recorded in scripture, that he went out to meditate at even-tide.

3. In the night season, when our bodies are reposed in the bed, then our souls should be reposed in the bosom of God by sweet meditation. We have the command of the Lord for this, "Commune with your own hearts upon your beds and be still." Psal. 4:4. And there is a double argument which may move you to this night-meditation.

(1.) Because then our souls are sequestered from the business of the world; they are retired from all the noise and tumult of things here below, they are not distracted with the incursions of sensible objects; and at such a time as that is, we are best fitted for meditation. Secrecy, silence and rest, dispose the soul for meditation; and all these we enjoy in the night season; then we are excluded from company, motion, and business.

(2.) Because when the curtain of darkness is drawn over the world, our hearts are apt to be filled with a religious fear of God, our souls are more composed in the night, and we have more awful apprehensions of God. And therefore observe the connexion, "stand in awe and sin not, commune with your own hearts upon your beds. The bed is an image and a representation of the grave," and at such a time as that is a man may be more serious and composed in this work. David says, "My reins also instruct me in the night season," Psal. 16:7. the meaning is David's inward thoughts did then read a lecture of divinity to him.

4. The sabbath day, is a season for meditation. This should be the temper of every christian to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. On that day when our Saviour did arise from the earth, our souls should ascend to heaven.

Consider with yourselves, the Lord's day is a type of heaven, and contemplation is the work of heaven. The rest of the sabbath is but an abridgement of that long eternity which the saints shall enjoy with God; and the employment of heaven is contemplation. The glorified spirits above are always exercised in a steady view and consideration of God's infinite glory. Now the sabbath being a type of heaven, and meditation being the work of heaven, certainly this day is the most fit season for meditation. As for you who disrelish this duty, and are unacquainted with it, do you expect heaven? Your indisposition to this duty will be a bar to keep you from blessedness, and hinder you from entering into that rest. A gracious soul upon the Lord's day by his meditation may converse with God; he may discourse with the

inhabitants of another world, he may enjoy as much of God as this interposing veil of flesh and blood will admit; the only difference between a saint in heaven, and a saint upon earth who meditates upon God, is in respect of the degrees and the manner of their fruition. For otherwise a saint upon earth enjoys heaven especially on the Lord's day, when every duty receives a special blessing, and therefore the duty of meditation.

Chapter IV: Of the Advantages of Meditation.

It improves the faculties of the soul, by opening the understanding, and raising the affections. Makes prayer, the word, and sacraments effectual. Improves the graces of faith, hope and love. It brings comfort. Increases holiness.

IV. THE advantages of meditation, are so many and so rich, that methinks the consideration of them might draw forth the most sluggish spirit to the performance of this duty. I confess the duty is difficult, but consider the pleasantness of it, out of the strong comes sweetness. The advantages of it I shall rank under five heads.

i. Consider what an improvement the faculties of your souls will receive by meditation.

1. I will begin with the understanding faculty.

Meditation is the nurse of wisdom, it is the most excellent instrument to convey knowledge to the soul. There are two defects in every man's understanding, there is darkness, and there is a fluidness in his understanding, that he cannot fix himself upon an object.

Meditation cures both these. For the darkness of his understanding, meditation takes the veil from the face of truth. The glory and beauty of truth, doth not consist in an expression, but we ought to penetrate into the nature of it by meditation. We have an expression of Solomon, speaking of knowledge and understanding, he bids us to "Search for her as for hidden treasure;" Prov. 4:2. observe the expression, you know jewels, do not lie upon the surface of the ground, but they are hid in the receptacles of the earth, you must dig for them before you can enjoy them. Truth is in Profundo, and our understandings are dark. Now you must search for the truth of God as for hid treasures. He that rides post through a country is never able to make a full description of it; and he that takes but a transitory view of the truths of the gospel, will never come to the full knowledge of them. It is meditation that makes them appear to our eye in their beauty and lustre. I have read a similitude of Peter Martyr that converted one. Suppose you should see a company of men dancing at a great distance, you would look upon the men as full of madness and frenzy; but if you draw near, then you will find their motions regular and full of art: so many mysteries of the gospel if you look upon them at a distance, they are above reason, they seem to oppose sense, you cannot see the truth of them; but bring them to a near distance within the view of thy soul by meditation, and then you will see their excellency and glory.

Meditation is that that doth take away the darkness of the understanding; and then for the fluidness of the understanding, because it is apt to spring from one thing to another. Meditation in its very nature is the fixing of it. Take one instance, but it is above all, it is such an instance, as should command the most knowing persons in the world to follow, 1 Pet. 1:10. There you shall find the words, "of which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you," and verse 12. speaking of the mysteries of the gospel, "The angels desire to look into them."

Now observe, if the prophets who had the immediate assistance of the Holy Ghost, did make a serious inquiry, and narrow search into their own prophecies, that they might come to know the meaning of them; should not this encourage us to make inquiry into the truth of God by meditation? Nay the angels of heaven, they bow themselves and pry into the mysteries of the gospel by a serious contemplation.

2. Consider, as meditation doth open the understanding, and presents truth to the brain, so it raiseth the affections. Knowledge without meditation to warm the affections, is like the glancing of a beam upon a wave, it fills it with a little clarity, but doth not heat it; so when there are many notions of truth in the brain, if meditation doth not apply them to the heart, and fix them upon the soul, the affections have no warmth by them. Slight visions make shallow impressions. He that with a running eye looks upon a piece of broidery, doth not see the curiousness of the work, and therefore doth not admire it. So when we with a running eye look upon the truths of the gospel, no wonder our affections are not raised towards them. David speaking concerning his meditation, "While I was musing the fire burned, my heart was hot within me." Psal. 39:3. It is musing makes the fire to burn. Thus meditation enlightens the understanding, and inflames the affections.

ii. It is the great instrument whereby the ordinances of the gospel become effectual to us. I shall instance in three of them. 1. Prayer. 2. Hearing. 3. Receiving the Lord's Supper. And you shall see what an eminent advantage meditation conveys to all these.

1. For prayer. Meditation before prayer, is like the tuning of an instrument and setting of it for the harmony. Meditation before prayer doth mature our conceptions, and exercises our desires. What is the reason that in prayer there is such a slight discurrency in our thoughts, that our thoughts are like dust in the wind carried to and fro; but only for want of meditation? What is the reason that our desires like an arrow shot by a weak bow do not reach the mark? but only this, we do not meditate before prayer; he that would but

consider before he comes to pray to the pure majesty of God, the things that he is to pray for, pardon of sin, and the life of glory, how would this cause his prayers to ascend like incense towards God? The great reason why our prayers are ineffectual, is because we do not meditate before them. David expresseth prayer, by meditation; "Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my meditation." Psal. 5:1.

2. For hearing the word, the benefit of that exceedingly depends upon meditation. Before we hear the meditation is like the plough which opens the ground to receive the seed, and after we have heard the word it is like the harrow which covers the new sown seed in the earth, that the fowls of the air may not pick it up: meditation is that which makes the word full of life and energy to our souls. What is the reason that the most of men come to hear the word as the beasts did into Noah's ark, they came in unclean and they went out unclean? The reason is because they do not meditate on the truths they hear; it is but just like putting money into a bag with holes, presently it falls out: so the truths they hear preached are put into shallow neglective memories, and they do not draw them forth by meditation, therefore hearing the word is so little effectual; it is said "Mary pondered these things in her heart." When men are sick of the lientery disease, (in which they do cast forth their meat as they receive it in) the body cannot be nourished, there cannot be those degrees of strength that others receive; but when our meat is digested, then it conveys blood, spirits and strength to all the parts of the body; hearing the word is like ingestion, and when we meditate upon the word that is digestion; and this digestion of the word by meditation produceth warm affections, zealous resolutions, and holy actions; and therefore if you desire to profit by hearing of the word, meditate.

3. For the receiving the sacrament, there you shall find that meditation is necessary before we receive, and in receiving. Before we receive, the great duty commanded is examination; now examination is managed by this duty of meditation: he that meditates aright concerning Jesus Christ, who is the author, the object and the end of the sacrament, he that considers with himself,

what rich testimonies there are of grace to the worthy receiver, and what sure marks of vengeance to the unworthy receiver, how will this dispose his soul for coming to this ordinance? He that meditates of his infinite misery out of Christ, and of his felicity in Christ, how will this sharpen his desires to come to the Lord Jesus? So in receiving, we should then meditate upon the sufferings of Christ; for the sacrament is the abridgment of Christ's agony; and upon the affections of Christ, for the sacrament is the copy of his love. And he that receives the sacrament with such meditations, will find his graces to be better and stronger, than the graces of others who neglect this duty. The sacrament is food, and so you must receive it with an appetite, with strong desires, and it must be concocted by meditation.

iii. The third advantage, the graces of the soul receive likewise an increase, and an advantage by meditation. Graces and meditation are reciprocal causes of each other; as food maintains our life, and our life dispenses our food, so here meditation maintains grace, and grace exerciseth meditation. There are three graces I will instance in, which all receive support, and strength from this duty.

1. The grace of faith. Our thoughts are the purveyors of our faith; when faith declines and languishes, when our thoughts are ready to terminate in despair, then meditation brings a cordial to our faith, and raiseth and recovers it. Meditation upon the grace of God, and upon his power, is the most eminent supporter of faith in all our temptations.

Meditation upon the grace of God. When a bleeding soul considers thus, God hath promised mercy, not to those who deserve it, but to those who want it; the promises are not built upon goodness within me, but upon grace without me: this raiseth faith, and produces life and spirit into it. So for the power of God, when we are in the midst of external wants and many dangers and hazards. When the soul shall meditate thus; that God by one fiat, by one word, gave being to the world, that his power is infinite, how doth this underprop our

faith? We have examples of this recorded of Abraham, it is said that "Abraham accounted that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Heb. 11:19. How did Abraham's faith become victorious? God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac. Now the promise was this, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Now how did he preserve his faith? Considering or meditating, that "God was able to raise him up even from the dead." Abraham considered thus much, there is such a power in God, that rather than the promise should be made void, the resurrection of Isaac shall be more miraculous than his birth, God is able to raise my son from the ashes of a consumed sacrifice; and therefore Abraham offers up his son willingly, as to his disposition and frame. So meditation of the truth of God, that he is the Father of lights, in whom there is no shadow of change, the Holy One of Israel that cannot lie, that his life and honour are engaged for the performance of all his promises; this supports and underprops all our declining faith, and makes it victorious.

2. Hope, which is another grace in the soul that thrives, and flourishes by the help of meditation. Faith is confirmed, and hope is enlarged by it. The christian who meditates upon these incomparable (but invisible) things that belong to another world: Oh this will enlarge his hope and make it the more generous and the more active. If a christian would but by meditation consider all those enamouring notions of heaven, and blessedness which the scripture lays down: if he would consider it as his portion, as a treasure, as a crown of glory, how would this enlarge his hope? Experience tells us, that men of low thoughts have barren hopes; the weakness of our hope, and the lowness of it proceeds from the neglect of meditation.

3. The grace of love that is begun and refined by meditation in the soul of every true believer; there is a love of desire towards God, and a love of complacency in him. Now meditation doth fire both these; there is a love of desire in him towards God, there is an affectionate longing after him: a thirsty love in the soul, that longs for an interest in Christ. Now what doth it proceed from? but from this, from a consideration of our infinite want of Christ, from a serious

meditation of those treasures of grace that are in the Lord Jesus. And then for the love of complacency, that flows from this. As the love of desire flows from the meditation of Christ's benefits: so the love of complacency arises from the meditation of his excellencies also. The person of Christ is invested with the most attractive glory, he is the image of his Father: now it is meditation that opens to us these excellencies of Christ, and the glorious blessings we receive from him, and so raiseth love of delight in him. It is meditation that blows our love into a purer flame, and raises it to a higher degree; therefore as you desire to have your love refined and raised towards God, meditate.

iv. Meditation, as it advanceth the graces of the soul, so the comforts of the soul. God conveys comfort to us in a rational way, and although he is able to rain manna in the wilderness, and to cast in comforts to our souls, without any labour of ours, yet usually he dispenseth comforts according to this standing rule: he that doth not work, shall not eat, he that doth not labour in the duties of religion, shall not find the sweetness of religion. Now meditation is the serious and active performance of the soul, to which God hath promised comfort. I will open this by this consideration. The promises of the gospel do not convey comfort to us, as they are recorded in the word merely but as they are applied by meditation: I will illustrate it by this similitude, the grapes while they hang upon the vine, do not produce that wine which cheers the heart of man; but when they are squeezed in the wine press then they yield forth their liquor, which is of such a cheering nature: so the promises while they are in the word barely, do not send forth that sovereign juice, which cheers our hearts; but when we ponder them in our souls, and press them by meditation, then the promises convey the water of life to us. There is an expression of David, which suits with this, Psal. 63. compare the 5th and 6th verses, "When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches, my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness;" observe the connexion, meditation turns the promises into marrow, it conveys the strength of them to our souls. One morsel of meat chewed and

digested, dispenses more nourishment than a greater quantity that is swallowed down whole; so one promise that is ruminated upon, and digested by meditation, conveys more comfort than a bundle of promises in the head, that are not meditated upon, which we did not consider. Nay, consider this, the comfort which meditation brings, is the most spiritual, refined joy that we are capable of. The pleasures of the world may excite laughter, but they cannot produce solid joy; but meditation produceth solid joy in the heart; the things of the world may gratify the bestial part of our bodies, but it is spiritual meditation that rejoiceth the angelical part of our souls within us. Indeed meditation is that which makes a man to be a citizen of the New Jerusalem; he can take a walk in the paradise of God every day, and pluck fruits off the tree of life, and draw water from the wells of salvation. He that performs conscientiously the duty of meditation, doth maintain such a correspondence with God as the angels do: such a one doth enter upon his possession of heaven by degrees and steps. Therefore if you desire the comforts that are spiritual and heavenly, perform this duty.

v. It is eminently useful to produce the power of holiness in our conversations. There are two parts of holiness in our lives, the one is the discharge of religious duties, the other is the repelling of temptations; now meditation enables us to both these.

1. It enables us to the discharge of religious duties, because it conveys to the soul the lively sense and feeling of God's goodness; so the soul is encouraged to duty. David hath an expression, "Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes, and I have walked in thy truth." Psal. 26:3. Meditation is that which makes religious duties to be refreshments to us; we look upon them as our ornament, and not as fetters, because meditation makes them sweet to us. You shall find in scripture there is a connexion between meditation and practice, between memory and duty. Therefore it is said, Numb. 15:40. "Thou shalt remember these things to do them," and Psal. 119:11. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee," and verse 15. "I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways;"

meditation is that which fills the soul with a lively sense of God's goodness, and so encourageth us to duty.

2. Then secondly, for repelling temptations, and for the conquest of them meditation is eminently useful. For consider the lapses of God's people proceed usually from incogitancy, and forgetfulness: if Peter had remembered that præmonition of Christ, he had not fallen into that sin; but because he was incogitant and forgetful, he fell into a snare: so we are surprised by incogitancy and neglect. Now meditation is that duty that draws forth suitable truths against every temptation, the memory is the exchequer of the soul, and there is a treasury of God's commands; now meditation goes into that treasury, and draws forth fresh arguments against every temptation, and therefore if you desire to be holy in your lives, perform this duty, and be serious and conscientious in the discharge of it. What an orator said in another case when he was asked, what was most eminent in rhetoric and oratory, gave this answer, pronunciation, pronunciation, pronunciation; so if I should be asked what do I think is the best means and way to advance the faculties, to make the ordinances fruitful, to increase grace, to enlarge our comfort, to produce holiness and the like, I should answer, meditation, meditation, meditation.

Chapter V: Rules for Managing Meditation to Advantage

Of rules for the managing meditation to advantage. Rules which respect the person. Freedom from the guilt of sin. Purity of heart. A treasure of divine truths. Sobriety in the use of worldly things. And fervent love to spiritual ones. Rules which respect the object. It should be what has a tendency to advance holiness, suitable to our present state and temper. Rules which respect the duty. We should be as methodical, and particular as may be. Discharge ourselves of

worldly things. Beg the assistance of the Spirit. Stop the first excursions of our thoughts: which will fix our minds. We must meditate by way of argument, comparison, emission in complaints and desires, and by impressions charging and checking our own souls: which will warm our affections.

V. THE rules, I shall reduce to these three heads;

Those which concern the person, that is to exercise this duty;—Those which respect the choice of our object;—Those rules which may direct us how we should meditate on the object with success and advantage.

i. Those which concern the person exercising this duty.

1. Rule. "Labour to have thy heart cleansed from the guilt of sin." A tumultuous conscience is very unfit for so calm and sedate an exercise as meditation. It is said, that when an elephant comes to the water, it disturbs the stream that it may not see the representation of its own visage; thus it is with guilty consciences, they cannot endure to look in the glass of meditation lest they should have a view of their native form. We read concerning the devils when they were near Christ, they asked him whether he were "come to torment them before their time?" This is the language of guilty creatures, therefore they do in effect utter the same words with the devil; "Depart from us we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Job 21:19. He that hath the sense of his guilt upon him, when he meditates on God, this brings to his remembrance the holiness, the justice, the truth of God; and this reminds him of his ruin, and so makes the duty very unpleasant to him. And by the way, take notice, this is the reason why wicked men are always either carried away with the pleasures or the business of the world, so that they may not have time to make inward reflections upon their own state and meditate on their own condition. As it is with a mill, if you do not put corn into it, it will grind itself; so they fill their minds with the vanities and businesses of the world, that they may not grind upon themselves: therefore cleanse your souls by

hearty applications of Christ's blood, if you desire to be fit for this duty.

2. Rule. "Labour for a pure heart." The former rule respected the guilt of sin, this the defilement. Meditation is founded in the purgative part of religion. There is a double reason for this rule, partly because sin darkens the understanding, it defiles and dims the soul. A soiled glass yields no clear representation of things: so when the heart is soiled with the filth of sin, it is not fit for this duty. Partly upon this account, because sin as it darkens the understanding, so it unfits the soul to receive any benefit by this duty. That cloth which is white is receptive of any colour, but that which is black will not change. So here, when the heart is cleansed and purified from the stains of sin, it will be moulded into the form of any truth the soul meditates upon; but when the blackness of sin is there, it is not receptive of any colour, or very difficultly. Gerson makes the first step of meditation, to be an humble repentance, upon this account, because it cleanseth the soul.

3. Rule. "Treasure up in your souls a stock of spiritual truths." Truth is the food of the soul, upon which it exerciseth its digestion and depastion; when a man hath laid in, he may lay out. Mat. 12:35. there is an excellent expression, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things." Truths in the soul are like gold in the ore: meditation coins the gold and brings it forth, in holy discourses and pious actions. Whereas where there are no spiritual mines of truth in the soul, it is no wonder the thoughts coin dross and vanity. Ignorance is that which doth impoverish the soul, and causeth us to be barren in this duty of meditation.

4. Rule. "Sobriety in the use of all worldly things," is an excellent help to meditation. A holy art of moderation, either in respect of the cares of the world, or the pleasures of the world; for an excess in these discomposes the mind, and unfits the body for this spiritual duty.

The business of the world, to speak of that first, will unfit us for the duty of meditation. When the mind ascends this hill, it must be light and free, and the burden of our cares must be laid aside. Have you not seen a bird, when her wings are limed, how unable she is to put forth herself, and to ascend by flight into the air? Thus it is with a man who is encumbered with worldly business, his thoughts are clinged together, and his soul is unable to take its flight, and to mount upward. And therefore we have an expression in the canticles, Christ speaks to his spouse, "Come my spouse let us go forth into the field," Cant. 7:11. which imports a retreat and sequestration from the business of the world, and a retirement from the hurry of worldly affairs.

And as the business of the world, so the pleasures of this world likewise exceedingly unfit us for this duty. When children's minds are set upon play, they are very unwilling to go to school; so when men's minds are set upon pleasure, this alienates their hearts from such severe exercises as meditation. I have read concerning Jerome, he complains of himself, that although he was in a desolate wilderness, yet his fancy conveyed him to the dances of the Roman ladies. So it is with pleasurable persons, let them sequester themselves from the visible company of men, yet their fancies are filled with corporeal resemblances: carnal pleasures make the heart fat, and so make the soul unable to perform such exercises as this is. It is said concerning the ass which is the dullest of all animals, that his heart is fattest of all creatures; this is very applicable to this duty of meditation. And therefore as you desire to be free and vigorous in this duty or exercise, disentangle yourselves from the cares and pleasures of the world.

5. Rule. "Labour for fervent love to spiritual things," and this will be an excellent help for the performance of this duty. Holy and lively affections do both incline and chain the thoughts to spiritual objects. As all rivers proceed from the sea, and return to the sea; so our thoughts proceed from our affections, and our affections are enkindled by our thoughts. This is the reason why the master

corruption, doth engross our thoughts, because our love is set upon it. Thoughts and affections are reciprocal causes of each other. As the body conveys heat to the clothes, and the clothes preserve the warmth of the body; so our thoughts are excited by our affections, and then our affections do cast forth their strength and efficacy upon our thoughts. Our thoughts enkindle our affections, and when the affections are kindled they cause our thoughts to boil over, Psalm 39:3. "While I was musing, the fire burned," and David says in the text, "Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day."

ii. Those rules which respect the object, that is to be meditated upon, the first of which is this.

1. Choose such an object as hath a tendency in it to advance holiness. There are some points in religion, which are chiefly speculative, there are others which are more practical. Now as the tops of mountains are barren, but the humble vallies fruitful. So speculative points are barren, and the meditation of them is ineffective. There are some slight dishes which gratify the palate, but have no substance in them to feed and strengthen the body: so there be some truths which though they are delicious, yet they do not produce holiness; and although they may please the taste, yet they yield no solid nourishment to the soul. Therefore choose such an object, as may at once more clear thy understanding in respect of knowledge, and also inflame thy affections God-wards. We lose much of the benefit of meditation, when we pitch our thoughts upon those objects which are not most fruitful. And here by the way observe, that many meaner christians do thrive more in holiness, than those of richer gifts upon this account, one sort are more subtile in the motion of their understandings, and the other are more sincere; they meditate upon those objects most fruitfully in reference to their lives, and so they make a sensible progress in the ways of religion, whereas others are barren.

2. Meditate upon those objects which are suitable to thy state. Our state respects either our temporals or our spirituals. Now for our

spirituals, I would direct your meditation answerable to that expression of Christ; where it is said, "the Spirit shall convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment." John 16:8. Now proportion your choice to the state wherein you are: as for example, art thou in a state of security? Let the object of thy meditation be the evil of sin, its intrinsical evil, and its consequential evil. Is thy soul pressed with the guilt of sin? Let thy meditation then respect the righteousness of Christ, the infinite sufficiency and amplitude, that is, in the merits the Lord Jesus, whereby he is able to repair all the injuries that have been offered to God's justice. Is thy soul sensible of the worth and excellency of the divine image and life? Then meditate upon judgment, upon holiness, how thou art obliged by an indispensable necessity, to live purely and according to the gospel. So in reference to temporals, let your meditation be suitable to your state: are you honourable? Then let your meditation be concerning your own vileness. Thus when David was raised to the throne: "What am I Lord, and what is my father's house?" Or, do you abound with the riches of this life? Let your meditation be how to exercise your stewardship to the best advantage. "The liberal man deviseth liberal things." Isa. 23:8. So, is your state afflictive? Then meditate upon the wisdom of God, who dispenseth not a grain more than your strength shall be able to bear, or whatever attribute may yield you comfort or advantage in such a state.

3. Choose such an object as doth correspond and is fit to present the temper of thy soul. God hath been pleased to allow us variety of objects. Sometimes we may contemplate the mysteries of the gospel, sometimes the beauties of the creation: when we are not fit for the severe exercises of the closet, we may go forth into the field, and there may consider the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, which are visible in all this works.

iii. Thirdly, and that which I principally eye, is, to lay down some rules, to direct you about the manner how you should perform this duty. The person being disposed by those qualities; and the object being chosen; how you should then meditate upon that object; the

general end you should propound to yourselves is, both to taste and see how good the Lord is; at once to have beams of light in our understandings, and influences of heat upon our affections; but sight must go before tasting, therefore our endeavour must be to manage this work aright: those that go by water for pleasure, do not cast out the net; but those do so that make it their gain and trade, that so they may catch the fish: so if we do intend to make an advantage to our souls in this duty, we should cast the net aright. Now there are two things I will open. 1. How you should fix your thoughts. 2. How you should warm your affections when you are meditating on the mercies of God.

1. For fixing our thoughts observe the following particulars.

(1.) Meditate in a methodical way. Begin with those things which are low, and then ascend higher, you will find a sensible advantage, by an orderly management of this duty; for this will be of special use to confine our thoughts. When we run from one object to another without order, we lose the benefit. As when there is a crowd of persons press forward to go through one door, all are hindered in their progress: so when our thoughts run from one object to another, we cannot proceed nor make such sensible progress as otherwise we might do, one thought hinders another. He that intends to go several ways, goes no way: so he that lets the eye of his soul run from one object to another without fixing, loseth the advantage of this duty; and therefore let us use an order and method in our thoughts.

(2.) Let your meditation be as particular as you can, in reference to the nature and circumstanced of the object. You know that particulars are affecting, and therefore we should labour to have as minute thoughts concerning every part of the object as we can; as to give you an instance, suppose my meditations were fixed upon the mercies of God, then the best way were to rank these mercies under several heads. Some are spiritual, some are corporal. If you would meditate upon the common mercies of this life, then take your rise with David, from the very first beginning of your being. "My

substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written;" (as an artificer first draws a model, and then finisheth it.) And then proceed a little, he brought me safely into the world, (which mercy would be thought miraculous but that it is ordinary.) And when I came, he provided two bottles of milk for me before I could help myself; and all my days mercy and my soul have been as twins of the same age, and day; and then consider the mercies of infancy, and childhood, and youth, and riper years. And then think of the mercies that respect the day, and the night; how God is like a pillar of cloud, and fire; and then divide these temporal mercies, some respect the estate, some the name, and some the health. He that shall thus meditate upon the mercies of God, he will by experience find, that he needs an eternal life to be thankful for the mercies of this temporal life.

(3.) Before you begin the work, let there be a serious discharge of all worldly things; whenever we engage in any duty we are apt to look back, because we do not leave the world behind us. Therefore when you begin this work, issue forth a practical decree, a strong resolution that you will not endure any vain thought to interpose between God and your souls; this is the girding up of our minds, that so we may not be hindered in our race.

(4.) Beg the assistance of the Holy Spirit: he that is able to stop the sun in its flight, and to bound the waters in their course; he is able to fix thy thoughts and to stop their motion.

(5.) Be careful to prevent or stop the first excursion of thy thoughts. Many times our thoughts hurry us away before we are aware; whereas, if there were a careful watchfulness, to prevent the first diversions, we should be more constant. In a town where there is a constant watch and ward, vagrants are stopped from entering, and hindered from conversing there; so if thy soul watch the first motions of thy thoughts, those vagrant excursions of them would be

prevented. Yet take this caution: suppose thy thoughts on a sudden do glance forth upon a carnal object; do not pore upon the thought, but rather proceed in thy work. For here is the devil's policy, to get that by reflex acts, which he cannot get by direct acts. And many times a christian loseth the advantage of the duty, by poring upon his vain thoughts. It is just like a crier in the court that calls for peace, and by his noise makes more disturbance. A man that is bent to go a journey, doth not regard the barking of every dog; so when thou dost design to ascend this mount, do not regard every vain thought that may be injected; but strengthen thy resolutions, and go forward in the discharge of thy work.

2. How we may perform this duty so as to inflame and fire our affections: for that take these four particulars.

(1.) When thou dost meditate upon a subject, which is of spiritual concernment, let thy thoughts work upon it by way of argument, and serious consideration both of the causes and of the effects of the object. As now suppose I were meditating upon the conversion of a sinner; here my thoughts should ascend to the cause of this conversion; it is the Spirit of holiness, he that is able by his power to raise from the grave, is alone able to raise from the power of sin: and then we should descend to the effects of things, for the effects are interpreters of the nature of their causes. As to instance; suppose I were meditating upon sin; consider the effects of sin, the fall of the angels, they were the courtiers of heaven, and the associates of God; but sin is that which cast them from their first habitation. So if you bring your eye lower to the fall of man; certainly the poison is very deadly, one draught of which destroyed the whole race of mankind. If you look upon the effects of sin, which are inward, there you shall find terrors of conscience; there is a spiritual tophet which sin hath enkindled: sin is that which causeth a man to walk up and down with a hell in his own bosom. If you look outward, upon men's bodies, and consider the effects of sin, all the diseases from the scorching fever, to the lingering consumption; all are the effects of sin; and chiefly if you regard the terrors of another life, if you consider the never dying

worm, and the ever living flames; these things discover the nature of sin.

(2.) That so this work may be the more efficacious upon your affections; manage it as by argument, so by comparisons. 1. By similitudes. 2. By comparing those things which are opposite one to another.

1st. By similitudes: they have an excellent force to prevail upon the soul, they are of great use, both to enlighten the understanding, and inflame the affections. To enlighten the understanding; a similitude is that which presents a truth clearly to our apprehensions: by the knowledge of a material thing that is visible, we come to the sight of a spiritual thing that is invisible; and therefore our Saviour trained up his disciples by earthly similitudes: you know a double medium helps the sight, therefore old men look through spectacles. Similitudes are like a double medium, and as they help our apprehensions, so they exceedingly inflame our affections. We naturally love pictures; now a similitude is the picture of truth, for fancy to look and gaze on; for instance, we all of us naturally are full of timorousness in the dark. Why do I not much more tremble at hell? "For there is blackness of darkness." We all of us fear death: then why do I not fear sin? which is the death of the noble part, which destroys the soul. Thus if you find your hearts dull and sluggish in the duties of religion, compare thyself with the creatures beneath thee, as thou art a rational being. The sun and stars obey their Creator by a constant law; there is an unalterable tenour of their obedience: and why do I swerve, and wander from the ways of holiness? They will contradict their private nature, to obey the commands of God; and why should I gratify my carnal lusts and pleasures to disobey God? As the Lord said to them in Malachi, when they were negligent in reference to their religious duties, he bids them put it into a temporal case, "offer it to thy governor, will he be pleased with thee." &c. Malachi 1:8.

2dly. Manage this comparison by way of dissimilitude, and compare things that are unlike one with another, and this will work on our

affections. For instance, compare the easiness of Christ's yoke with the bondage of sin, and this will raise your affections, and intender them in reference to the Lord Jesus. Compare the beauty of holiness with the exorbitances of a carnal life: consider every sinner hath many lords, many tyrants over him; but he that is a servant of Christ, hath but one master, who is full of meekness and sweetness. These lords command contrary things; and thus while one lust ravishes the soul to itself, another hales it to another object; whereas all the commands of Christ are regular, and they all centre in one end, to advance the glory of God. Then consider the different fruit; those that are slaves to their lusts, have sin for their work, and hell for their wages; their service is drudgery, and their recompence eternal death: but the ways of God are liberty here, and glory hereafter. The commands of the gospel, are not fetters, but ornaments, and they bring a crown; how would this cause the soul with a greater willingness to submit to the commands of the gospel! Shall wicked men draw sin "as with cart-ropes?" Isa. 5:18. that is, shall they toil and spend themselves in the service of their lusts? And shall I refuse obedience to that God whose service is perfect freedom?

3. When thou art meditating that so it may be fruitful; let there be frequent emissions of thy soul to God: let thy thoughts be moulded into words, and that, (1.) By way of complaint. (2.) By way of desire.

(1.) By way of complaint, as when thou art meditating concerning the glory of another world, then reflect upon thy soul thus, and complain to God, Oh wretched man that I am, who to chained to this earth! My treacherous nature betrays me to the vanities of this life. Oh that I should be insensible of spiritual joys! and charmed by sensual delights! Oh that I should be so mad upon and fond of perishing vanities, and dis esteem and undervalue a blessed eternity! Thus we should complain to God of ourselves, there should be confession mixed with this complaint.

(2.) These emissions towards God should go forth in a way of desire and request to him. We should breathe forth our souls thus. Oh when

shall my brazen affections be melted? When shall I be unglued from the world? What, shall I be a stranger in my affections, as I am in my residence? O Lord thou who hast prepared glory for my soul, prepare my soul for glory.

4. Manage this duty, by way of impressions upon the heart, when you have thus sent forth your souls to God. As it is when a vapour is drawn up to heaven, it afterwards returns to the earth: so when thy thoughts have been drawn up towards God, then they should descend upon thyself, and that in a double way. (1.) By way of charge to quicken thy soul to duty. (2.) By way of check and restraint to keep thy soul from sin.

(1.) By way of charge to quicken thy soul to duty. As when a christian considers with himself, how superficial tie is in the service of God, how (many times) he offers a sacrifice without a heart; let him charge his soul thus. My soul, consider that God doth both deserve, and require thy affections: he is the Maker, the Searcher, the Redeemer, and Judge of spirits; in him there is majesty and purity conjoined; and therefore when thou art engaged in any religious service, draw near to hint with thy spirit. Why should we debase God, when we pretend to honour him? and deal with his name as the devil did with the body of Christ; who raised him to a pinnacle of the temple, intending to throw him down? So many seem to honour God, when at the same time they debase him.

(2.) By way of check and restraint from sin. Whenever any temptation presents itself to us: let us by meditation thus argue. What will be the fruit of these things? Can we resist the wrath of God? Are we stronger than he? The temptation is pleasing, but the issue of compliance will be dreadful. The time is a coming when there will remain nothing of sin, but the worm and the flame. Thus we should check our hearts, and repress them in their motions towards sin, that we may stop the career of our sins, and may be restrained from the commission of them.

Chapter VI: A Use of Trial.

The difference between holy men and others, shown by their thoughts: which are the immediate issues of the heart, and the invisible, delightful, continued acts of the soul. Necessary cautions. A difference between voluntary and injected thoughts. Good thoughts pleasant to us, and productive of holiness: else no sign of our spiritual state.

FIRST by way of trial. This assertion of David, contains the character of a man that is truly gracious. "Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day." And it is that which is the original distinction between a carnal and a gracious frame of heart; a gracious man's soul is the "chamber of presence for the Holy Spirit." The soul of a carnal man, is the devil's thoroughfare: temptations are let in, and corruptions are let out. You know a painter may draw the external representations of a man, but he cannot set forth the vitals, the inward parts: so it is here, although there may be a similitude between the external practices of a saint, and a carnal wretch; yet the inward motions of the Understanding, and the working of the affections, cannot be represented by a wicked man. If you take the whole world of unregenerate men, and look into their breasts; you will find that some of them like the camelion, feed upon the air of honour; and others like the serpent, feed upon the dust of profit; and most like the swine satisfy themselves with the will of carnal pleasure. This is the temper of their souls, and these are the objects about which they exercise their thoughts. But now take a gracious man, he substantiates heaven by his forethoughts of it; if the breast of a gracious man were transparent, you would find a line drawn from his soul towards God. Herein is a great difference between these two sorts of men: there is an expression of Solomon, concerning the temper of a fool; (now Solomon's fool is the wicked man.) As "he thinketh in his heart, so he is." Prov. 23:7. The thoughts

of the soul discover most naturally the frame and temper of the heart. For the opening of this a little more, consider these four particulars in reference to our thoughts and meditation, and they will clear up the difference between a godly man, and one that yet is but in his natural state.

1. Consider this, that the thoughts whereby meditation is managed, are the immediate issues of the heart and therefore the best discoveries of a man. There are many interposing circumstances between our actions and our affections many times; but there is no interposition between the heart and the thoughts. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts," (saith Christ.) Matt. 15:19. He that would taste of the water of the sea, must take it up immediately from the sea, and not when it hath passed through the veins of the earth some miles; for so it loseth its brackishness. So he that would pass an estimate upon the state and frame of a man, must judge of his thoughts which immediately arise from the soul: for you cannot judge of him (many times) by his external actions. Therefore by what your continued meditation is upon, you may conclude your state good or bad.

2. They are the invisible productions of the soul; and that is another thing which makes them the better to discover our temper: they are neither subject to the knowledge, nor to the censure of the world; so that a man doth act most naturally in them. Fear and shame are two great checks and restraints from evil actions. Praise and interest are two great attractives to good actions, in reference to wicked men. Fear and shame restrain them from sin. Praise and interest excite them to good. But now thoughts are neither capable of these restraints, nor of those attractives; because they are not subject to the eye of the world. And this is the reason why many that dare not steal with the hand, yet dare steal with die eye; and so those that dare not defile another's body, yet dare pollute their own souls with speculative wickedness, because their thoughts are invisible, not seen by the eye of the world; and this fortifies and strengthens this difference.

3. Our thoughts as they are the invisible productions of the soul, so they are the most delightful acts of the soul: our thoughts proceed from our affections; and therefore you may find the temper of the heart by them: and this is the reason why the different thoughts of men, stream forth in various and different ways. As a covetous man sets up an image of gold, and falls down and worships it in his thoughts, and this is very delightful and pleasing to him, because the world is his God. And thus pleasurable persons set up images of vanity, and these they look upon with the greatest delight and contentment; because pleasure is their God: so an ambitious man fancies echoes of praise, he hears the sound of his own glory; and this takes up his thoughts most delightfully and pleasingly, because honour is his God. Now a gracious heart looks upon things spiritual, as those chiefly that deserve his affections, for his thoughts run upon them.

4. Our thoughts are the continued acts of the soul. There is nothing so profuse in all the world as the soul of man; it is always spending of itself. The sun is not so full of beams, as the heart is of thoughts. Now where the temper of the soul is carnal, there is a vile expence of our thoughts upon base inferior objects; but where the soul is changed and renewed, there is a constant tendency of the soul towards God there, the thoughts by troops run up to heaven, and unbosom themselves in God. These are the refined acts of the soul, and therefore they do the most fully represent the difference that is between a carnal and a spiritual man. There are only these three cautions I will fix to this trial; possibly many of you may fancy yourselves changed upon this account, because sometimes you have good thoughts within you; therefore take three cautions to strengthen the trial.

(1.) Consider there is a difference between good thoughts that ascend from the frame of our heart; and those that are injected from without. For instance, a gracious man's holy thoughts ascend from the spiritual frame that is in his soul; but now a wicked man may have holy thoughts cast into him as a flash of lightning in the night,

which doth not make a day; neither doth the injection of some holy thoughts, argue the frame of his heart spiritual and holy. When he hath been hearing a warm sermon, then he thinks with himself, heaven deserves his choice and eager pursuits; this is but from without, and therefore doth not argue that he is spiritual. Paul calls thoughts the "counsels of our hearts:" 1 Cor. 4:5. now when thy thoughts are the fruit of thy counsel; when thou dost determine to think of God, this argues the frame of thy spirit to be changed; but if it be merely an injection, thou mayest be in a natural state. I will illustrate it by its contrary; a gracious heart may have evil thoughts cast into him, there may be a rape committed upon his understanding; yet nevertheless he may not be a carnal person: so thou mayest have good thoughts cast into thee, yet this doth not arise from the frame and temper of thy soul. Bad thoughts may rush into a godly man, but they do not rest there: so good thoughts may be injected into wicked men, but pass away and are very transient, they do not arise from the frame of their hearts.

(2.) Consider whether these holy thoughts which sometimes are in thy soul, are cherished there as in their proper place and centre. In the 17th of Job v. 11. there is an expression concerning our thoughts, they are called "the possessions of our hearts;" for so the word signifies in the original, and so it is rendered in the margin of your bibles. Now have spiritual thoughts their residence there? Are they fixed there as in their natural soil? Are they in thy heart as meat in the stomach, which is received in its proper place, and so turned to food and nourishment? Good thoughts in a wicked man, are like wind in the bowels of the earth, which is never quiet till it hath made an eruption; or like thunder in a cloud, that breaks forth in violence.

(3.) Are these spiritual thoughts in thy heart, productive of holiness in thy life? then it is an argument the frame of thy soul is right: our thoughts are implicit words, and our actions are explicit thoughts; therefore if thou find the power of meditation in thy life, this is an argument, those thoughts which are in thy soul, are natural.

Chapter VII: A Use of Reproof.

Carnal men reprov'd for their total neglect of meditation. And regenerate men for their too great disuse of it, and remissness in it: wherein they are guilty of unkindness to God, and disparagement of him.

FOR reproof, and that; to carnal and sensual men; to those that are truly gracious.

First, To the carnal and sensual sinner, that lives in a constant neglect of this spiritual duty of meditation. Oh it is a sad complaint, "God is not in all their thoughts:" consider with thyself, how many years thou hast lived in the world, and thy thoughts have been altogether strangers to heaven? Did God give unto thee that cabinet of thy understanding, either to keep it empty, or to treasure up in it only chaff or dung? Did God intend when he made thee a rational creature, that thou shouldst only spend thy thoughts either upon those things that are unprofitable, or those that are sinful? Certainly God had higher ends when he gave to thee a reasonable soul. To press the sense of this upon you: consider with yourselves the sinfulness of neglecting this duty of meditation; it degrades thee from that honour which God hath given thee in thy creation; it debaseth thee and maketh thee of the inferior rank of creatures. There is an excellent expression in the 92 Psalm, ver. 5. "O Lord how great are thy works, and thy thoughts are very deep?" It follows in the 6th verse, "a brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this." Observe the expression, those persons that neglect this duty of spiritual meditation, and do not consider the works of God; degrade and reduce themselves into the order of beasts. A carnal man that looks only upon the form and figure of external things, hath no better apprehension of them then a brute hath: a brute looks upon them with as clear an eye, as a carnal wretch; he

that looks upon the things of the world, as only made for his own end, and not for the glory of God; and he that neglects the consideration of spiritual things lives like a brute. A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool consider this; so that there is a great deal of evil and sin in it. Consider further some of the heaviest judgments that are recorded in scripture, have been exercised for the sins of thoughts: you know the angels lost heaven for their aspiring thoughts; and the old world were consumed by the deluge for their unclean ones; therefore certainly the neglect of this duty, which consists in the exercise of thoughts is a very great sin. Thy evil thoughts are like young vipers, which destroy the mother that bare them; so thy evil thoughts will destroy thy heart which conceives them. At the last day one of the great parts of the account we must give to God, must be of our thoughts, Rom 2:16. "when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Then there shall be a narrow inquest made of the thoughts of men; and those thoughts which thou esteemest as nothing in reference to the lightness of the sin that is committed by them, will be as numerous as the sand, and prove as weighty. You that content yourselves to spend days, weeks, and years without meditation: Oh you that spend your thoughts upon trivial vanities: considers in hell your thoughts shall be your chief tormentors, then every thought shall be as a dagger or poniard to stab thy soul. The worm that never dies, implies the sad reflections of conscience upon your evil ways, and that is managed by your thoughts; those thoughts now that are the chief part of your sin, they shall then be the sharpest executioners: therefore turn the stream of your thoughts towards God.

Secondly. Those who are gracious, and have a principle of regeneration in them, they deserve reproof upon a double account: partly because they so much neglect this duty of meditation, and partly because they are so remiss in the performance of it.

1. They neglect and disuse this duty. That there are such large gaps, and strides between our performances of meditation, it should strike

us with fear and sorrow. The most christians are apt to look upon meditation, and those other duties which are wholly spiritual, as melancholy interruptions of their peace and quiet, and thereupon are very backward in the discharge of them.

2. When we do perform them, how weak and how remiss are our thoughts? Our thoughts are like an arrow which is shot from a bow that is weakly bent, they will not reach their mark, they die in their very birth, and lose their life before they have performed any thing. How should this fill us with sorrow? As it is with the pegs of an instrument, when you are winding them up they slip down between your fingers, and when you have raised them to a due pitch, they presently fall again; so it is with our thoughts in heavenly meditation; when we are raising them, they slide down; and when we have lifted them up in some measure, how soon do they fall to the earth again! This is a great sin and crime of a high nature. Consider first, what an unkind recompence is this to God, that you should spend your thoughts but seldom upon him? His thoughts were fixed from everlasting upon you, and will not you send up your thoughts for a short time to him? His thoughts are ever drawing forth towards you, and shall yours move seldom towards him? Psal. 40:5. saith Dauid, "many O Lord my God are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts to us ward, they cannot be reckoned up in order to thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." He hath from eternity spent his thoughts upon you, and they are every moment going forth towards you; there should be a continual return of our thoughts to him. Nay he hath given his Son to you, and will you not give your thoughts to him? It is the most unkind recompence to neglect this duty of meditation.

3. Consider it is a real disparagement to God, when we shall turn our meditation from him to sinful objects. When we shall prefer carnal sweets before him. If the eye doth not abide upon the object, it is either because the object displeaseth, or because the eye is taken off by something that is better; so if our meditations are so fleeting and unsteady in reference to God, what is the reason? either God doth

not please us, or something better that pleaseth us draws our eyes off from him; and this casts a real disparagement upon God. Oh that we should forsake the Fountain of Living Waters for broken cisterns, that can hold no water!

Chapter VIII: A Use of Exhortation.

Frequency and constancy in meditation pressed upon holy men This is the best use of our understandings. An imitation of Christ's example. Wicked men's thoughts being so fixed on the world, should provoke us to it. Holy men have a divine nature disposing them to this duty. It is one of the best instruments of communion with God. And makes way for an abundant entrance into heaven.

BY way of exhortation. To all those that are truly gracious, let me press upon them, the constant and frequent discharge of the duty of meditation: and that I shall urge by these arguments.

First. Consider, this duty restores thy understanding to its primitive authority, it puts thy reason to the purest and best use; therefore thou shouldest be frequent and serious in the discharge of it. This is that which vindicates and rescues our understanding from its captivity to the flesh, and restores it from its prostitution to our senses; it refines our reason, it advanceth it. This should be a powerful argument to persuade you to the performance of it. Our thoughts are winged messengers, that are able to mount above the visible heavens, to go towards God himself. Now meditation is that duty that puts them to their best use: why should our thoughts inherit the curse of the serpent, to cleave to the earth, and feed upon ashes, when there is such a duty wherein we may exercise them? Therefore you that are christians should consider this, and accordingly should be excited to the discharge of this duty.

Secondly. Let me press this duty upon you from the example of the Lord Jesus. Psal. 16:8. "I have set the Lord always before me." David speaks that concerning himself by way of type, it is spoken of the Lord Jesus principally as appears by Acts 2:25. our Saviour Christ when he was upon the earth, he was in heaven, not only in regard of the residence of his Deity, but in respect of his thoughts and affections. The thoughts of Christ were as numerous as the stars, and they were all in order as the stars; they were all spiritual and heavenly. Now there should be a conformity between the members and the head; it is the apostle's exhortation. "Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ." Phil. 2:5. Therefore as you desire to be conformed to him, so be frequent in the exercise of this duty.

Thirdly. Consider the example of wicked men, how their thoughts are all fixed upon the earth, and let this be a motive to you. Take but the covetous worldling, and what are his thoughts upon, but gainful contrivances, how he may recruit his estate, how those that deal with him may be losers, and he may be a winner? You may read it in the expression of the fool in the gospel, "I will pluck down my barns and build greater, &c." Luke 12:28. These were his musings upon his bed, and thus doth a worldly person. If you come to a voluptuous person, what are his thoughts upon? He makes a supposition to serve instead of enjoying, and all his thoughts are spent upon this; how he may gratify his carnal senses, how he may make provision for the flesh. And if you come to a proud person, what are his thoughts bent upon? He dreams of a ladder, whereby he may climb up to the top of honour. Now shall carnal spirits spend the strength of their souls upon such perishing vanities; and will not you spend your thoughts upon God and Christ, and upon the things of eternity? Shall a wicked man by his meditations draw forth as it were the quintessence of earth; and shall not we extract for the good of our souls, the marrow of the promises and the sweetness of religion?

Fourthly. There is a divine nature conveyed to you, which disposeth you for this duty. Indeed it is no wonder that a carnal man is always meditating upon worldly things, for he hath only in him that which is

conveyed from the first Adam. Now the first "Adam was of the earth, earthly." But a gracious soul hath a new nature: now that is an active principle, and enables the soul to spiritual things. This is the glory of the christian religion, that it changeth the thoughts of men; and whereas your papists mumble over their prayers by number, and your carnal persons, moral protestants are only conversant about the external acts of religion: regeneration changeth the frame of our thoughts, and maketh us to mount upwards. Gracious souls are disposed for it; what Christ spake concerning leaven in the gospel, it raiseth the meal and swells it: so when grace is put into thy soul, it insinuates itself into thy thoughts, into thy discourses, into thy actions. Those that are regenerated can in some measure perform this duty naturally and easily; it is as easy for the flame to ascend, as for a stone to descend. A vine doth with as much ease produce grapes, as a thistle or a thorn doth prickles: and therefore thy heart may produce spiritual meditations, with almost as much ease as a carnal man shall produce sensual corrupt vile thoughts; if thou do not injure the divine nature, but exercise it in sending up holy thoughts towards God.

Fifthly. Consider that this duty of meditation, is one of the choicest instruments of our communion with God. Communion with God is managed by duties on our part, and by donatives on God's part: by the ascents of our minds to God, and by the descents of God to our minds. Now meditation is that duty whereby the soul doth mount upwards towards God. By meditation a christian is able to discourse with the inhabitants of the invisible world: by meditation he is able to walk with God, to eye God in all his ways: by meditation he is able to draw from God, those comforts which every attribute doth promise and bring forth to the soul. This is that great duty whereby we manage communion with him: and this know by the way, those christians which are most neglective of this duty, will find a sensible declination both in their affections and in their practice, because they neglect communion with God. For all the progress both of holiness and joy that we make, it is grounded upon our communion with him; and therefore the neglect of it will be a breach in our communion,

and consequently will bring a dearth, both in respect of our graces and our comforts.

Sixthly. Consider by the serious performance of this duty, thou wilt procure for thy soul an abundant entrance into the kingdom of glory. Such a christian doth enter upon his inheritance by degrees; his thoughts and affections are forerunners, and as harbingers to take up those mansions of glory. So that as we read concerning the angel that appeared to Manoah in the book of Judges, he ascended up in the flame of the sacrifice: so it is with a christian, his meditation doth enkindle his affections, and then he ascends up in the flame of his affections unto God. Such a christian when he comes to die, changeth his place but not his company; for he was in heaven, when he was upon earth. The discharge of this duty would cause in our souls a lower heaven, and therefore you should perform it with the greater care. Consider, what is the heaven of angels? It is this, they always behold the face of their heavenly Father; the constant and steady contemplation of God is the heaven of angels. Now meditation is that duty whereby we contemplate God. I confess there is this difference, while we are upon earth, we look upon God with an unsteady eye, as a man that holds an optic glass with a palsy hand; he looks upon the stars; but the glass is held so unsteady, that he cannot fully and fixedly look upon them: so we differ in degree of fruition, but not in the substance. The soul that hath conversed with God, and frequently walked with him, it will be no strange thing for him to die; for he hath been dead to the world before, his soul hath been in heaven in reference to his desires, before it comes to heaven in reference to its own substance.

To finish all, as you would desire to have real and solid arguments of the change of your state; so be serious and very strict in the discharge of meditation. The old nature like a root is always productive of carnal thoughts: the devil is the tiller and husbandman of the old heart, and he makes those fruits that grow of themselves, to be more productive. But now if thy nature be changed, there is a spiritual seed conveyed into thy soul, and the influences of heaven should make

you fruitful: and as you desire that, be strict in this duty. Although the beams of the sun touch the earth, yet the body of the sun is fixed in its own orb and sphere: so let this be the frame of your souls, although you must converse with the world, yet let your thoughts, your desires, your joys, your affections be with God in heaven, while these external commerces you must have with the world, declare you to be on the earth.

Chapter IX: The foregoing rules exemplified in a meditation on the sufferings of Christ

THAT which I design in the last place, is to reduce those rules which I gave for meditation to practice upon this subject, viz. The sufferings of Christ.

And first, one rule I laid down was to be as particular as you can, in reference to the nature and circumstances of the object you meditate upon. Accordingly,

First. Lay down a draught of Christ's sufferings, and present that to yourselves: he that shall trace the story of Christ from the cradle to the cross, will find it to be a continual crucifixion, his life was a passive action, his death an active passion. But I shall confine myself more particularly to that which was the Coronis and the most eminent part of his sufferings, and therefore for the more particular setting this before you. I will propound the crucifixion of Christ as it respects his body;—The agonies and sorrows of his spirit, which was the highest part of his sufferings. For the first of these, that which respected his body, the scripture takes notice of three eminent circumstances which belong to that. The ignominy, curse, misery of it.

1. The ignominy of his crucifixion: and if you look into the scripture, you shall find he was scorned in every one of his offices. As he was a king, so he was sceptred with a reed, and crowned with thorns. As he was a prophet, so they blinded him and bade him prophesy who smote him. As he was a priest they clothed him a long robe, which was an emblem of that office. The ignominy of our Saviour's sufferings, respecteth the kind of his death, the place of his death, and the companions of his death if you respect the kind of it; it was hanging on a tree, that death which rendered the person, and showed the fact to be abominable. If you respect the place of his death, he was not crucified in a corner, but upon the top of Mount Calvary, so that he was exposed to the view of the world. If you respect the companions of his death, they were the dregs and worst of mankind, thieves and robbers: thus you see he that was the "glory of heaven," is made the "shame of earth;" and he who was the adoration of angels, is the scorn of sinful wretches.

2. The second circumstance is the curse of his death. The scripture doth assert this, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Gal. 3:13. There was both a ceremonial and a moral curse in the death of Christ: the ceremonial curse was his hanging upon a cross: for the custom of the Jews was this, upon any notorious fact, the malefactor was first put to death, by stoning, or the like; and then his body was hanged up before the sun: so that the hanging of a person, was a kind of second death, and this the Lord Jesus endured. The moral curse likewise did concur to the death of the Lord Jesus, he bare the iniquity of us all.

3. The misery of it, which was inexpressible. Every part of Christ was a receptacle of pain: those deaths which are lingering, there is a slow pace in them, but a quick torment. So it was with the Lord Jesus, his hands, and his feet were nailed to the cross; they were those parts which were most distant from the vitals, and animal spirits, and so his death was an extended torture. Now by meditation the soul should represent this crucifixion of Christ to itself.

If you come to the sufferings of his soul, Christ had a real taste of the bitterness of the second death. He drank up the cup of horror, he endured the pains of hell, though not specie yet pondere;* though he did not endure the same in kind; yet he did in degree: though he did not suffer a local hell, yet he suffered a penal hell. Thus represent these things to your souls, by the help of meditation.

To gather up the sum. The gracious soul, when it would warm itself with the consideration of Christ's death; let it make itself a party in every passage of the story of his passion; end let the soul mix its affections with all the occurrences of it: as for example. First go to the garden, and there let thy soul consider the sweat that dropped from him, hear his groans, and see his agonies. Then follow him to the rulers and soldiers; and there consider all those actions of theirs, which contained the greatest scorn, slighting, and abuse of him. When the thorns are platted upon his head, let them pierce thy heart. Then go from the ruler's house to Mount Calvary, and let thy soul take up part of the cross; and when thou comest there let it be nailed to the cross, and bleed with love for thy Saviour. The soul by reflex acts is able in some degree, to produce same passion and sorrow, which it would produce if the object was visible to our bodily eye. Now there is none of you but fancy if you had a visible representation of Christ hanging upon the cross, expending his blood, bowing his head, sending forth his Spirit, this would affect you. By meditation represent this to the eye of thy soul, and Oh let it produce suitable passions and affections.

Another rule I gave you was this, when you meditate upon a spiritual subject do it by way of argument; considering the causes and effects of it: so here, consider the causes and effects of Christ's sufferings. The causes of his sufferings are two, the love of the Father, and the love of Christ: I know the sin of man was the occasion of it. There was miseranda necessitas a miserable necessity on our part, but the cause was commiserans voluntas, commiserating mercy on God's part.

1. To speak of the love of the Father. The scripture represents this to us as the original cause of Christ's death. "Herein God declared his love to us, that when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Rom. 5:8.

2. The love of Christ was the cause of this. Acts of grace cannot be extorted. Now this was merely an act of grace in Christ to give up himself to die for us. Therefore you find in the first treaty that was between God and Christ, Christ declares an absolute resignation to the will of God, "Lo I come to do thy will, O my God." Heb. 10:7. Obedience to his Father and love to man, was the cause of Christ's sufferings. Therefore although the death of Christ was violent in respect of men, it was voluntary in respect of himself: "I lay down my life." Observe a vast difference between Christ's answer to Peter, and his answer to Judas; when Peter out of an irregular pity to Christ's person, desired him to favour himself; because that hindered man's redemption, he saith, "get thee behind me satan." John 10:15. Mat. 16:23. Mat. 26:50. How sharp and severe was it? But when Judas comes to betray Christ, he calls him friend. What a great difference is there in the answers of Christ? This shows the willingness of his compliance with his Father's decrees; the love of Christ was the cause of his sufferings; that love which was as ancient as his Deity, and survived his humanity.

In the second place, let us proceed to the effects of these sufferings, and that will be an object fit for our meditation. There are five eminent effects of Christ's sufferings, which the scripture speaks of.

1. Complete satisfaction to the justice of his Father. The sufferings of Christ were enriched by the union of his Deity; his blood was the blood of God: it was more for a God to satisfy, than for a man to sin. The violation of the law, was an act of the creature; but the fulfilling of the law was an act of the Creator; and therefore justice is completely satisfied. Upon this account Rev. 4:3. we read that the throne of God, is encompassed with a rainbow. A rainbow is an emblem of peace. The justice of God receives more glory in the

redemption of our souls, than in the damnation of the world. For Christ at once made full satisfaction, but all the damned souls in hell are ever satisfying. You know a payment may be made of equal value in a small weight of gold, which is equivalent to a greater weight of silver; Christ's blood and sufferings although they were short in respect of their time and duration; yet they did exceed the eternal torments of the damned in respect of the worth of his person.

2. The second effect of Christ's sufferings is, laying a foundation for the calming and quieting of conscience. Conscience is God's officer, and when the Judge is appeased, conscience then should suspend its accusations; the blood of Christ may well be called spiritual wine, for it doth at once cheer the heart of God by way of satisfaction, and the heart of man by way of pacification. Conscience cannot alledge any thing, but what may be answered from the death of Christ. I confess many times believing souls are full of perplexities; for the bee that hath lost her sting, may keep a noise and buz, although it cannot injure us: so when sin hath lost its sting by his death, yet there may be a noise about us, and this may trouble us; but this proceeds not from the weakness of Christ's satisfaction, but from the weakness of our faith.

3. The third effect of Christ's death is this, the powers of darkness are broken by it. He that had power of death, the devil is now made an object of triumph. The devil thought he might get a complete victory when Christ suffered, but Christ tells us, "Now is the prince of this world judged." John 16:11. Death itself that is our last enemy was destroyed by the death of Christ. And this was the reason why, when Christ died, many saints rose up and lived again in Jerusalem, to declare to us death was conquered. And at the last day the grave shall give up its spoil, by virtue of Christ's death.

4. The fourth effect of Christ's death is this, the crucifixion of sin. Therefore the scripture tells us, the old man is crucified with him. Sin brought Christ to the cross, and Christ brought sin to the cross and nailed it there. Herein appears the admirable wisdom of God, that as

sin brought in death, so the death of Christ should carry out sin, I mean in reference to believers.

5. The inheritance of glory is the fruit and effect of Christ's death. The blood of Christ, ratifies the New Testament. It is the key of paradise, and opens heaven for us: there was such an exuberancy in the merits of Christ; such a supererogation of worth, that not only satisfied for us, but purchased an inheritance for us. Whereas the first Adam had an earthly paradise; the second Adam purchased for us an everlasting state of glory: this is another medium, whereby you may exercise the duty of meditation in your souls.

Thirdly. Another rule I laid down was this, when you do consider of any objects, amplify them by way of comparison, and that either by way of similitude or dissimilitude; do so as to the sufferings of Christ.

1. If you take die sufferings and amplify them by way of comparison. But there is nothing in the creation, that is a fit subject fully to represent them by: I shall therefore make a parallel (as the scripture doth) between the death and crucifixion of Christ for us, and the death and killing of sin within us. The death of Christ was a real death, and so should the death of sin be: many times in the bodies of men, there is an interruption of the vital and animal spirits; so that some one part of the body, is as it were dead; as in those that lie under palsies and the like; but it is not a real death, till the soul be separated from the body: there was a real separation between the soul and the body in Christ; so there should be between sin and us. The death of Christ was a sharp and dolorous death; so we should exercise a holy severity against sin: we should not allow any indulgence to our lusts. The death of Christ was a gradual and a lingering death: so should we condemn our sins too, that since we cannot kill them at once, yet they should die by degrees.

2. By dissimilitude. The scripture hath an eminent instance, 1 Pet. 1:18. "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things" (observe the dissimilitude) "as silver and gold;

but with the precious blood of Christ." Take all the treasures of the world, although we deify them they cannot free one soul; it was only the sacred treasures of heaven the blood of the Lord Jesus that was able to free us from the wrath to come. Indeed the consideration of Christ's blood stains all the glory of the world, and impoverished the richest splendour of the whole universe.

Another rule which I propounded to you was to meditate on a spiritual subject by way of emission or ejaculation of your souls to God, and that two ways. 1. By way of complaint. 2. By way of desire.

1st. Let the soul send forth itself to God by way of complaint of its insensibility of these sufferings of Christ. Did the whole creation bear a share with the Lord Jesus in his sufferings, and shall our hard hearts be insensible? when the Son of God was debased, the sun of the world was darkened and eclipsed, and durst not show its glory. 'The whole world (as I may so speak) was hung with mourning,' in reference to the sufferings of Christ; and shall our souls be insensible of these sufferings? The veil of the temple was rent, and shall not our hearts? Impress these considerations. The creature that was not the cause of Christ's death and sufferings, sympathized with him, and shall man who was the cause neglect and despise them? Christ shed drops of blood, and shall not we spend hearty sighs? How should we thus complain of ourselves to the Lord, concerning the hardness of our hearts.

2dly. By way of desire, and that in two respects, when we meditate upon the death of Christ. 1. That we may have an interest in those sufferings. 2. That we may feel the sensible fruit of them.

(1.) That we may have an interest in these sufferings. It is not a naked contemplation, but the implantation of our souls into Christ's death, that makes it effectual to us. There were many that did see the ark, yet lost their lives, because they were without it. So many may have an historical knowledge, yet because they are not united to Christ, they receive no benefit: therefore beg that God would implant thee

into that likeness of Christ's death, that he would unite thee to the Lord Jesus. Remember possession follows union. Christ's garments only cover Christ's members; therefore let thy desires be excited after an interest in him;

(2.) That you may feel the sensible fruits and benefits of those sufferings of Christ. And here the soul should send forth its desires to God. Oh that my sins might feel the vinegar and the gall! Oh that they were nailed to the cross of Christ! Oh that I might find the fruits of the cross! Oh that his pains might produce peace to my soul! Thus the heart of a gracious person should send forth his desires to God.

Another rule I gave you for the managing the duty of meditation, was by way of impression upon our own souls, and that likewise in a double manner. 1. By way of charge. 2. By way of restraint. Do so as to the sufferings of Christ.

1. By way of charge. After the soul hath warmed itself with the meditation of them, let it impress upon itself these three things by way of charge. To exercise faith; to inflame its love; and to enliven its obedience.

To exercise its faith. Thus let the soul of a christian reflect upon itself: "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" Psal. 42:5. Why dost thou fear the punishment of sin, when guilt is taken away? Why art thou tossed to and fro with anxious fears and perplexities? Consider the Lord Christ hath died; and this is that which makes the apostle to cry victory over all our spiritual enemies. There are two things which usually do weaken the trust of believers. One is the greatness of their sins, the other is the weakness of their faith. Now the sufferings of Christ answer both these. For the greatness of thy sins propose this; our sins are but finite acts, and therefore cannot preponderate his infinite righteousness. Oh consider, thy sin is infinite indeed in respect of the object; but the righteousness of Christ is infinite in respect of the subject: certainly the obedience of God is more

available to reconcile us, than the disobedience of man was to make an enmity between God and us. Consider thus with thyself, if thou hadst always lived in a spotless innocency, thou wouldst not then be afraid of God: yes, but the righteousness of Christ exceeds the natural robe of thine innocency. If the angels may always look upon the face of God, who are only clothed with their natural righteousness; certainly a believer may who is clothed with the righteousness of Christ. That blood is able to redeem ten thousand worlds.

Suppose thy trust is taken off by reason of the weakness of thy faith, thou fearest thy faith is not strong enough. The meditation of Christ's sufferings will answer that; for impress this upon thy soul. The price is the same and the acceptance of God is the same, both in reference to a strong faith and a weak faith. A weak eye that looked upon the brazen serpent, was an instrument to cure the body as well as a strong eye. The wings of a dove may carry it over the river, as well as the wings of an eagle; and a weak faith may lay hold on the righteousness of Christ, as well as the strong, and embrace it. Oh remember, the strongest faith is not the purchaser of our salvation; and therefore when thy faith is weak, yet encourage thyself by considering the sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

2. By way of check and restraint. When ever you find your souls tempted to sin, let this allay the heat of the temptation; and let the consideration of Christ's sufferings repel all those fiery darts. Let me allude to that of David, when the water of Bethlehem was brought to him, which was purchased by the hazard of men's lives, saith he, "Shall I drink the blood of these men? And he poured forth the water before the Lord." When ever thy soul is tempted to sin, then argue thus; shall that, that was his sorrow, be my joy? Sin was the spear that opened his side, and the nails that pierced his hands. Sin is that which makes every person to be a Judas to betray him; a Pilate to condemn him and soldiers to crucify him. And shall we thus again crucify the Lord Jesus? Shall we add sorrow to sorrow? This is one of

the most noble and powerful means to restrain and check the soul, whenever the temptations of sin are strong and vigorous upon thee.

To conclude, the sum of what I would say is this. In this meditation of the death of Christ, let the duty be,

Serious, Affectionate, Applicative, Practical

First. Serious. It is an expression of the apostle, "Consider the Lord Jesus;" let not your "views be transient sudden glances, which do no good; but represent the Lord Jesus before your eyes in a serious and solemn manner. And you that are to come to the sacrament have an advantage of others: kings do many times represent their own persons in the broad seal; they sit upon a throne sceptred and the like: so Christ in the sacrament (which is the seal of heaven) represents his own person. There is only this difference, the picture of a king is a dead representation: but the Lord Christ in the sacrament is most livelily and efficaciously represented to the soul.

Secondly. Let it be an affectionate view. Let your affections correspond with the Lord Jesus Christ in all the passages of his sufferings. If that argument will not break us, the flames of hell will melt us. Always make reflections upon yourselves, and consider that you were the invisible crucifiers of Christ.

Thirdly. Let your meditation be applicative, always make an impression upon your souls. The generality of people look upon the death of Christ as the death of a martyr, and not as a Mediator; only as the death of an innocent person, that suffered without cause; therefore they spend their declamations against the Jews, the soldiers, and Pilate; but vain persons they never reflect upon their own hearts, they do not apply it to their own souls. Consider it is not the blood of Christ, as it was shed upon the cross; but as sprinkled on thy heart that saves thee; and therefore make application of it when ever thou meditatest upon the sufferings of Christ.

Fourthly. Let thy meditation be practical, reduce it to obedience. Oh this is to realize it in our thoughts; when we live as those that feel the influences and power of Christ's death in our souls; when we find our hearts thereby to be enlivened in the duties of holiness, and our corruptions to wither and decay and fall before us, then it is that we meditate aright upon the death of the Lord Jesus.

Take this as an encouragement. Those that thus make application of Christ as crucified; shall hereafter be conformed to Christ as glorified. Those that now feed upon his body in the sacrament by faith, shall hereafter feed upon his face by sight and vision, for ever and ever.

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