

M

THE DUTY OF MEDITATION

THOMAS MANTON



M

**THE DUTY OF
MEDITATION**

THOMAS MANTON

The Duty of Meditation

by Thomas Manton

Table of Contents

[Sermon I: I will meditate in thy precepts](#)

[Sermon II: I will delight myself in thy statutes](#)

[Sermon III: Deal bountifully with thy servant](#)

[Sermon IV: Open thou mine eyes](#)

[Sermon V: Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide](#)

Sermon I:

I will meditate in thy precepts

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
—VER. 15.

ALL along David had showed what he had done; now, what he will do. Ver. 10, 'I have sought;' 'ver. 11, 'I have hid;' ver. 13, 'I have declared;' ver. 14, 'I have rejoiced.' Now, in the two following verses,

he doth engage himself to set his mark towards God for time to come: 'I will meditate in thy precepts,' &c. We should not rest upon anything already done and past, but continue the same diligence unto the end. Here is David's hearty resolution and purpose to go on for time to come. Many will say, Thus I have done when I was young, or had more leisure and rest; in that I have meditated and conferred. You must continue still in a holy course. To begin to build and leave unfinished is an argument of folly. There is always the same reason for going on that there was for beginning, both for necessity, profit, and sweetness. We have no license to slack and give over till all be finished: Phil. 2:12, 'Work out your own salvation;' otherwise all you do is in vain, yet not in vain: Gal. 3:4, in vain as to final reward, yet not in vain as to increase of punishment. You lose your cost, your watchings, striving, prayings; but you will gain a more heavy punishment, so that it had been better you had never begun: 2 Peter 2:20, 21, 'For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them.' You bring an ill report upon God; your sense of the worth of heavenly things must needs be greater for your making trial; and therefore your punishment for neglect the greater. Into the vineyard they came at several hours, but all tarried till the close of the day. Some called sooner, some later, but all held out till the end: Heb. 6:10, 11, you; have ministered and must minister; you have prayed and must pray; you have heard the word with gladness, and must hear still. Many in youth are zealous, but when their first heats are spent, grow worldly, careless, and ready to sound a retreat from God. The fire of the altar was never to go out; so should the life, and warmth, and vigour of our affections to the word of God be ever preserved. God is the same still, and so is the word; and therefore we should ever be the same in our respects to it. The devil in policy lets men alone for a while, to manifest some respect to the ways of God, that they may after do religion a mischief. They are full of zeal, strict, holy, diligent in

attendance upon ordinances. He never troubleth them, but is at truce with them all this while, till they get some name for the profession of godliness, and then he knoweth their fall will be the more scandalous and ignominious, not only to themselves, but to their profession. They are forward and hot men a while, till they have run themselves out of breath, and then by a notable defection shame themselves, and harden others.

Compare it with the 13th verse, 'I have declared;' now 'I will meditate.' To be warm and affectionate in our expressions of respect to the word before others, and to slight it in our own hearts, argueth, gross hypocrisy; therefore David would not only confer, but meditate. Many talk with others, but not with their own soul: 'Commune with your hearts, and be still.' True zeal is uniform; when there is no witness but God, it acts alike.

Refer it to the 14th verse, David had spoken of his delight in the law; now, that he would meditate therein; in both not to boast, but to excite others by his example: that is to be understood all along when he speaketh of his diligence in and about the law of God. But mark, first the word was his delight, and then his meditation, Delight causeth meditation, and meditation increaseth delight: Ps. 1:2, 'But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.' A man that delighteth in the law of God will exercise his mind therein. Our thoughts follow our affections. It is tedious and irksome to the flesh to meditate, but delight will carry us out. The smallest actions, when we have no delight in them, seem tedious and burdensome. It was no great matter for Haman to lead Mordecai's horse, yet a burdensome offensive service, because it was against his will. The difficulty that we find in holy duties lieth not in the duties themselves, but in the awkwardness of our affections. Many think they have no parts, and therefore they cannot meditate. He that findeth a heart to this work will find a head. Delight will set the mind a-work, for we are apt to muse and pause upon that which is pleasing to us. Why are not holy thoughts as natural and as kindly to us as carnal? The defect is in the heart: 'I have rejoiced in thy

testimonies,' saith David, and therefore 'I will meditate in thy statutes.'

In the words there is a double expression of David's love to the law of God:—

1. I will meditate in thy precepts.
2. I will have respect to thy ways.

Concerning which observe—

1. In both the notion by which the word of God is expressed and diversified, precepts, ways. The word precepts implieth God's authority, by which the counsels of the word are ratified. Ways implieth a certain direction for our walk to heaven. There are God's ways to us declared in his promises. So it is said, Ps. 25:10, 'All the paths of God are mercy and truth.' Our ways to God, ver. 4 of that psalm: 'Show me thy ways, teach me thy paths.' These are his precepts.

2. Observe, the one is the fruit of the other: 'I will meditate;' and then, 'I will have respect.' Meditation is in order to practice; and if it be right, it will beget a respect to the ways of God. We do not meditate that we may rest in contemplation, but in order to obedience: Josh. 1:8, 'Thou shalt meditate in the book of the law day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.' So Phil. 4:8, 9, 'Think of these things,' 'do these things'—λογίζεσθε. When you cast up your accounts, and consider what God hath required of you, it is that you may set upon the work. Meditation is not a flourishing of the wit, that we may please the fancy by playing with divine truths (sense is diseased that must be fed with quails), but a serious inculcation of them upon the heart, that we may urge it to practice. Nor yet an acquainting ourselves with the word that we may speak of it in company: conference is for others, meditation for ourselves when we are alone. Words are but the female issue of our thoughts, works the male. Nor merely to store

ourselves with curious notions and subtile inquiries; study searcheth out a truth, but meditation improveth it for practical use: it is better to be sincere than subtile.

3. Observe, this practical obedience is expressed by having respect unto the ways of God. To respect God's ways is to take heed that we do not turn out of them, to regard them and ourselves: 'Observe to do them,' Josh. 1:8; and it is called elsewhere, pondering our path: Prov. 4:26, 'Ponder the path of thy feet,' that we may not mistake our way, nor wander out of it. Respect to God's word was opened ver. 6 and 9. The main point is this—

That one great duty of the saints is meditating on the word of God, and such matters as are contained therein.

Let us inquire what meditation is, because the practice and knowledge of the duty is almost become a stranger to us. Before I can define, I must distinguish it. Meditation is—

1. Occasional.

2. Set and solemn.

1. Occasional meditation is an act by which the soul spiritualiseth every object about which it is conversant. A gracious heart is like an alembic; it can distil useful thoughts out of all things that it meeteth with. Look, as it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things. Thus Christ at Jacob's well discourseth of the well of life, John 4; at the miracle of the loaves, discourseth of manna, John 6 and 7; at the feast of tabernacles, of living waters; at the Pharisee's supper, discourseth of eating bread in the kingdom of God, Luke 14:15. There is a holy chemistry and art that a Christian hath to turn water into wine, brass into gold, to make earthly occasions and objects minister spiritual and heavenly thoughts. God trained up the old church by types and ceremonies, that the things they ordinarily conversed with might put them in mind of God and Christ, their duties, and dangers, and sins. And our Lord in the New Testament taught by parables and

similitudes taken from ordinary functions and offices amongst men, that in every trade and calling we might be employed in our worldly business with a heavenly mind; that whether in the shop, or at the loom, or in the field, we might still think of Christ, and grace, and heaven. There is a parable of the merchantman, a parable of the sower, a parable of the man calling his servants to account, &c., that upon all these occasions we might wind up our minds, and extract some spiritual use from our common affairs. Thus the creatures lift up our minds to the creator. David had his night meditation: Ps. 8:3, 'When I consider the heavens, the work of thy hands, the moon, and the stars which thou hast ordained,' &c.;—the sun is not mentioned. When he was gone abroad in the night, his heart was set on work presently: and Ps. 19:5, there is a morning meditation, for he seemeth to describe the sun coming out of his chambers in the east, and displaying his beams like a cloth of gold upon the world. A holy heart cannot want an object to lead him to the meditation of God's power, and goodness, and glory, and wise providence, who hath made and doth order all things according to the counsel of his will. There is a great deal of practical divinity in the very bosom of nature, if we had the skill to find it out. Job biddeth us, 'Ask the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.' They speak by our thoughts.

2. There is set and solemn meditation. Now this is of several sorts, or rather, they are several parts of the same exercise.

[1.] There is a reflective meditation, which is nothing but a solemn parley between a man and his own heart: Ps. 4:4, 'Commune with; your own heart and be still;' when we have withdrawn ourselves from company, that the mind may return upon itself, to consider what we are, what we have been, what straits and temptations we have passed through, how we overcame them, how we passed from death to life. This is a necessary part of meditation, but very difficult. What can be more against self-love and carnal ease than for a man to be his own accuser and judge? All our shifts are to avoid our own company, and

to run away from ourselves. The basilisk dieth by seeing himself in a mirror, and a guilty man cannot endure to see his own natural face in the glass of the word. The worldly man choketh his soul with business, lest, for want of work, the mind, like a mill, should fall upon itself. The voluptuous person melteth away his days in pleasure, and charmeth his soul into a deep sleep with the potion of outward delights, lest it should awake and talk with him. Well, then, it is necessary that you should take some time to discourse with yourselves, to ask of your souls what you have been, what you are, what you have done, what shall become of you to all eternity: Jer. 8:6, 'No man asketh of himself, what have I done?' You would think it strange of two men that conversed every day for forty or fifty years, and yet all this while they did not know one another. Now, this is the case between us and our own souls; we live a long time in the world, and yet are strangers to ourselves.

[2.] There is a meditation which is more direct, when we exercise our minds in the word of God and the matters contained therein. This is twofold:—

(1.) Dogmatical, or the searching out of a truth in order to knowledge: 'Proving what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God,' Rom. 12:2. This is study, and differeth from meditation in the object, and supposeth the matter we search after to be unknown, either in whole or in part; whereas practical meditation is the inculcation or whetting of a known truth upon the soul: and it differs in the end; the end of study is information, and the end of meditation is practice, or a work upon the affections. Study is like a winter sun, that shineth, but warmeth not; but meditation is like blowing up the fire, where we do not mind the blaze but the heat. The end of study is to hoard up truth; but of meditation, to lay it forth in conference or holy conversation. In study, we are rather like vintners, that take in wine to store themselves for sale; in meditation, like those that buy wine for their own use and comfort. A vintner's cellar may be better stored than a nobleman's; the student may have more of notion and

knowledge, but the practical Christian hath more of taste and refreshment.

(2.) Practical and applicative. This we now speak of; and it is that duty and exercise of religion whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn consideration and improvement of the truths which we understand and believe, for practical uses and purposes. Not like a man that soweth and never reapeth; or a woman that often conceives, but never brings forth living children.

(1st.) It is a duty; for it is commanded, Josh. 1:8, '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.' As the promise is general, 'I will not leave thee nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5, so is the command. To meditate in the law is a part of the description of a godly man: Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' It is commended to us by the practice and example of the saints in scripture. Isaac, Gen. 24:63, 'went out to meditate in the field in the eventide,' to pray, as in the margin; the word in the original is indifferent to both senses; it properly signifieth muttering, or an imperfect or suppressed sound. The Septuagint sometimes renders it by ἀείδειν, to sing; but others by ἀδολεσχεῖν, which signifies to exercise himself. The word is used here ἐν ταῖς ἐντολαῖς σοῦ ἀδολεσχήσω. Symmachus, λαλήσαι, to speak; Aquila, ὁμιλήσαι, to discourse with God and his own soul. The original word, נִשְׁחַח, signifieth to mutter, or such a speaking as is between thoughts and words. He made his duty his refreshment and solace at night. So David often in this psalm. Reason enforceth it. God, that is a spirit, deserveth the most pure and spiritual worship by the mind, as well as that which is performed by the body. Thoughts are the eldest and noblest offspring of the soul, and it is fit they should be consecrated to converse with God.

(2d.) It is a necessary duty; not a thing of arbitrary concernment, a moral help that may be observed and omitted at our pleasure; but of

absolute use, without which all graces wither. Faith is lean unless it be fed with meditation on the promises: Ps. 119:92, 'I had fainted in my affliction, unless thy word had been my delight.' Hope is not lively unless we contemplate the thing hoped for, and, with Abraham, walk through the land of promise, Gen. 15, and think often and seriously on 'the glory of the riches of the inheritance of the saints,' Eph. 1:18, and get upon the mount of meditation, upon the top of Pisgah, to get a view of the land. So for love; the more we study 'the height, and breadth, and depth of God's love in Christ,' Eph. 3:18, 19, the more is the heart melted and drawn out to God, and more quickened to obedience: Ps. 26:3, 'Thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes.' And as it helpeth our graces in their exercise, so all other duties; as hearing of the word. To hear and not to meditate is unfruitful. The heart is hard and the memory slippery, the thoughts loose and vain; and therefore, unless we cover the good seed, the fowls of the air will catch it away. It is like a thing put into a bag with holes—lost while it is received: James 1:23, 24, 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls; for if a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of person he was.' Bare hearing begets but transient thoughts, and leaveth but a weak impression in the soul; like a flash of lightning, as soon gone as come, or the glance of a sunbeam upon a wave. A man never discerneth the scope, the beauty, the order of the truths delivered, till he cometh to meditate on them, and to go over them again and again in his thoughts: Ps. 62:11, 'God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this,' &c., i.e., when we repeat it upon our thoughts, inculcate it, and meditate upon it, this maketh a deeper impression, and that which is spoken rebounds again and again; it is twice heard. David saith, Ps. 119:99, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers, for thy testimonies are my meditation.' The preacher can but lay down general theorems and deduce practical inferences; but that which fasteneth them upon the heart is our own thoughts; and so we come to be wiser, to see more clearly and practically as to our own case than he that preacheth; we see a further use than he was aware of. So for prayer; what we take in

by the word we digest by meditation, and let out by prayer. These three duties help one another. What is the reason men have such a barren, dry, and sapless spirit in their prayers? It is for want of exercising themselves in holy thoughts: Ps. 45:1, 'My heart inditeth a good matter;' and then 'My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.' It alludeth to the mincah, the meat-offering; the oil and flour were to be kneaded together, and fried in a pan, and so offered to the Lord. When we come with raw dough-baked offerings, before we have concocted and prepared our thoughts by mature deliberation, we are barren or tumultuary in our prayers to God. Prayer is called by the name of meditation, because it is the product and issue of it; as Ps. 5:1, 'Give ear to my words, O Lord; consider my meditation.' So Ps. 19:14, 'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight;' implying that prayer is but the vent and expression of what we have deliberated and meditated upon. So David findeth his desires more earnest after grace, the more he mused and meditated: Ps. 143:5, 6, 'I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the works of thy hands; I stretch forth my hands unto thee; my soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty land.' Well, then, it is the life and strength of other ordinances, without which how slight and perfunctory are we! I might instance in conference; the stream of good discourse is fed by serious thoughts. The Lord's Supper, a duty which is mainly despatched by our thoughts; there we come to put reason to the highest use, to be the instrument of faith and love; of faith in believing applications; of love, in resolutions of duty and thankfulness. In that one ordinance there is a union of mysteries, which we take abroad in holy and serious thoughts. To have an unfruitful understanding, then, is a great damp and deadness to the heart. Now, we shall never enlarge ourselves in pertinent and savoury thoughts, unless we use to meditate; for spiritual dispositions do not come upon us of a sudden, and by rapt motions, but by progressive and orderly degrees and preparations.

(3d.) It is a profitable duty as to temporals. Isaac went out to meditate, and of a sudden he espieth the camels coming upon which

Rebecca was brought to him, Gen. 24:63, 64. Was this a mere accident, think you, or a providence worthy of remark and observation? Isaac goes to meet with God, and there he gets the first view of his bosom-friend and spouse. This was a mercy cast into the bargain. 'Godliness hath the promises of this life, and that which is to come.' There is nothing lost by duty and acts of piety. Seneca said the Jews were a foolish people, because they lost the full seventh part of their lives—*Septimam ætatis partem perdunt vacando*; intending their sabbath-time. This is the sense of nature, to think all lost that is bestowed upon God. Flesh and blood crieth out, What need this waste? they cannot spare time from their callings, they have families to maintain. Oh! let me tell you, by serving God you drive on two cares at once. Worldly interests are cast into the way of religion, and though not designed and intended by us, these things are added to us. For comforts and manifestations of God, we have them many times in our recess and the privacy of our retirements, in a more plentiful manner than elsewhere. 'The spouse inviteth the bridegroom, Cant. 7:11, 'Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field.' Upon which Bernard, *O sancta anima, fuge publicum, fuge. An nescis te verecundum habere sponsum, qui nequaquam tibi velit indulgere præsentiam suam coram aliis?* We have most experiences of God when we are alone with him, and sequestered from all distractions of company and business, solacing ourselves with God. Exod. 3:1, Moses drove the sheep to the back side of the wilderness, and came to the mount of God: he goeth aside from the other shepherds, that he might converse with the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, and there he seeth the vision of the fiery bush. Usually God cometh to us in our deep meditation; when the soul is most elevated, and fittest to entertain the comforts of his presence, then we have sensible experience of God.

The standing spiritual benefits of meditation are many. It imprints and fastens a truth upon the mind and memory. Deliberate thoughts stick with us, as a lesson we have conned is not easily forgotten. Civet long kept in a box, the scent remaineth when the civet is taken out. Sermons meditated on are remembered by us long after they are

delivered: it sets the heart a-work. The greatest matters will not work upon him that doth not think of them. Tell them of sin, and God, and Christ, and heaven and hell, and they stir them not, because they do not take these truths into their deep thoughts; or if they be stirred a little, it is but a fit, while the truth is held in the view of conscience. We had need inculcate things if we would have them to affect us. The steel must beat again and again upon the flint, if we would have the sparks fly out; so must the understanding bear hard upon the will, to get out any affection and respect to the ways of God. It showeth the beauty of truths. When we look upon them in transitu, we do not see half that is in them; but upon a deliberate view it more appeareth; as there is a secret grace in some, that is not discerned but by much converse and narrow inspection. It helpeth to prevent vain thoughts. The mind of man is restless, and cannot lie idle; therefore it is good to employ it with good thoughts, and set it a-work on holy things; for then there will be no time and heart for vanity, the mind being prepossessed and seasoned already; but when the heart is left to run loose, vanity increaseth upon us. O Christians! meditation is all; it is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace. We resemble the purity and simplicity of God most in the holiness of our thoughts. Without meditation we do but talk one after another like parrots, and take up things by mere hearsay, and repeat them by rote, without affection and life, or discerning the worth and excellency of what we speak. It is meditation that maketh truths always ready and present with us: Prov. 6:21, 22, 'Bind them continually upon thy heart; when thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee.' But I forbear.

1. Whereby the mind is applied to serious and solemn consideration. I add this, to distinguish it from occasional meditation, and those good thoughts that accidentally rush into our minds, and to note the care and attention of soul that we should use in such an exercise. It is musing makes the fire burn: glances or transient thoughts, or running over a truth in haste, is not meditation, but a serious attention of mind. It is not to take a snatch and away, but to make a

meal of truth, and to work it into our hearts. Alas! a slight thought, that is like a flash of lightning, gone as soon as come, doth nothing. Constant thoughts are operative; and a truth, the longer it is held in the view of conscience, the more powerful it is: Deut. 32:46, 'Set your hearts to all the words which I testify among you this day.' A sudden thought may be none of ours; it may be unwelcome, and find no entertainment with us, but set your hearts to it: Luke 9:44, 'Let these things sink down into your hearts;' let them go to the quick: Prov. 18:1, 'Through desire a man having separated himself, intermeddeth in all wisdom.' Then is a man fit for these pure and holy thoughts, for intermeddling in all wise and divine matters, when he hath divorced himself from other cares, and is able to keep his understanding under a prudent confinement.

2. Of the truths which we understand and believe. In meditation we suppose the object understood; for it is the work of study to search it out, of meditation to enforce and apply it; and we suppose it believed and granted to be a truth. The work now is to improve our assent, that it may have an answerable force and efficacy upon the soul.

3. It follows in the description, for practical uses and purposes. Meditation is not to store the head with notions, but to better the heart. We meditate of God that we may love him and fear him; of sin, that we may abhor it; of hell, that we may avoid it; of heaven, that we may pursue it. Still the end is practical, to quicken us to greater diligence and care in the heavenly life.

Use 1. To reprove those that are seldom in this work. Worldly cares and sloth and ease divert us; if we had a heart, we would have time and leisure. The clean beasts did chew the cud. We should go over, and over, and over again the truths of God in our thoughts. But alas!

1. Either men muse on trifles; all the day their minds are full of chaff and vanity. Oh! hast thou thoughts for other things, and hast thou no thoughts for God's precepts? Hast thou not a God and a Christ to

think of? And is not salvation by him, and everlasting glory, worthy of your choicest thoughts? You have thoughts enough and to spare for other things—for base things, for very toys—and why not for God and the word of God? Why not for Christ and that everlasting redemption he hath accomplished for us? If a man would throw his meat and drink down the kennel, rather than give to him that asketh him, the world would cry shame upon him. Will you cast away your thoughts upon idle vanities rather than God shall have them? Oh, shame! Your thoughts must be working. What! shall they run waste, and yet God have no turn?

2. Or else men muse on that which is evil. There are many sins engross the thoughts.

[1.] Uncleanness sets up a stage in the heart, whereon a polluted fancy personates and acts over the pleasures of that sin. Our thoughts are often panders to our lust: 2 Peter 2:14, 'Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.' The unclean rolling of fancy on the beauty of women is forbid: Mat. 5:28, 'He that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

[2.] Revenge; the thoughts of it, how sweet are they to a carnal heart! Men dwell upon their discontents and injuries till, like liquors that sour in the vessel when long kept, they sharpen revenge. We are apt to concoct anger into malice: 'Frowardness is in his heart; he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord,' Prov. 6:14.

[3.] Envy stirreth up repining thoughts; it is a sin that feedeth on the mind: 1 Sam. 18:9, 'And Saul envied David from that day forward.' David's ten thousands ever ran in Saul's mind. Envy muses on the good of others to hate them.

[4.] Pride, in lofty conceits and whispers of vanity: Luke 1:51, 'He hath scattered the proud in the imaginations of their hearts.' Proud men are full of musings. 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built,

for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' Dan. 4:30. Proud men please themselves with the suppositions of applause, and the echoes of praise in their minds.

[5.] Covetousness consists chiefly in a vain musing: Ezek. 33:31, 'Their heart goeth after their covetousness;' 2 Peter 2:14, 'Hearts exercised with covetous practices.'

Use 2 is of exhortation, to press us to meditate on God's precepts. Many think it is an exercise that doth not suit with their temper; it is a good exercise, but for those that can use it. It is true there is a great deal of difference among Christians. Some are more serious and consistent, and have a greater command over their thoughts; others are of a more slight and weak spirit, and less apt for duties of retirement and recollection; but our unfitness is usually moral rather than natural, not so much by temper as by ill use. Now, sinful indispositions do not disannul our engagements to God, as a servant's drunkenness doth not excuse him from work. Inky water cannot wash the hands clean. That it is a culpable unfitness appeareth partly because disuse and neglect is the cause of it; those that use it have a greater command over the thoughts. Men count it a great yoke; custom would make it easy. Every duty is a help to itself; and the more we meditate the more we may. They that use it much find more of sweetness than difficulty in it. If a man did use to govern his thoughts, they would come more to hand. Partly, want of love. We pause and stay upon such objects as we delight in. Love naileth the soul to the object or thing beloved: Ps. 119:97, 'Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.' Carnal men find no burden in their thoughts; their heart is in them. Well, then, though you have not such choice and savoury thoughts as others have, yet set upon the work; you can think of anything you love.

Oh! but, as some press it, it requireth art and skill, and logical disposition of places of argumentation.

Ans. We cannot tie you to a method. Serious thoughts, no question, are required, and dealing with the heart about it in the best way of reasoning that we can use. Take these directions:—

1. Look how others muse how to commit a sin; and shall not we muse how to redress it? Wicked men sit a-brood: Isa. 59:5, 'They hatch the cockatrice egg, and weave the spider's web; they devise mischief upon the bed;' Micah 2:1, 'Woe to them that devise mischief on their beds.' So do you muse how to carry on the work of the day with success: Prov. 16:30, 'The wicked man shutteth his eyes to devise froward things;' it signifies his pensive solitary muttering with himself.

2. As you would persuade others to good. Surely you do not count admonition so hard a work. What words you would use to them, use the same thoughts to yourself: heart answereth to heart.

3. You understand a truth; you have arguments evident and strong why you should believe it; repeat them over to the soul with application: Job 5:27, 'See it, and know it for thy good.' This application is partly by way of trial, partly by way of charge. By way of trial: How is it with thee, O my soul?—Rom. 8:31, 'What shall we say to these things?' By way of charge and command: Ps. 73:28, 'It is good for me to draw nigh to God; I have put my trust in the Lord, that I might declare all thy works.'

SERMON II

I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.—VER. 16.

DAVID had spoken much of his respect to the word, both as to his former practice and future resolutions. A godly man, the more good he doth, the more he desireth, delighteth, and resolveth to do.

Spiritual affections grow upon us by practice and much exercise. The graces of the Spirit and the duties of religion do every one fortify and strengthen one another; lose one, and lose all; keep one, and keep all. Meditation breedeth delight, and delight helpeth memory and practice. He had said, 'I will meditate on thy precepts;' and now, 'I will delight myself in thy statutes;' and that produceth a further benefit, 'I will not forget thy word.'

The spiritual life is refreshed with change as well as the natural; but it is with change of exercise, not of affection. There is hearing, praying, conferring, meditating, and all with delight; for when one fontinel is drawn dry, we may, as the lamb doth, suck another that will yield new supply and sweetness. David had spoken of his various exercises about the word, in the use of all which he would maintain a spiritual delight.

In this verse observe again a double respect to the word of God:—

1. I will delight myself in thy statutes.
2. I will not forget thy word.

These are fitly suited. Delight preventeth forgetfulness; the mind will run upon that which the heart is delighted in; and the heart is where the treasure is, Mat. 6:21. Worldly men, that are intent upon carnal interests, forget the word; it is not their delight. If anything displease us, we are glad if we can forget it; it is some release from an inconvenience to take off our thoughts from it; but it doubleth the contentment of a thing that we are delighted in to remember it and call it to mind. In the outward school, if a scholar by his own averseness from learning, or by the severity and imprudence of his master, by his morosity or unreasonable exactions, hath no delight in his book, all that he learneth is lost and forgotten; it goeth in at one ear, and out at the other: but this is the true art of memory, to cause them to delight in what they learn. Such instructions as we take in with a sweetness, they stick with us, and run in our minds night and

day. So saith David here, 'I will delight in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.'

Doct. 1. One great respect which the saints owe to the word of God is to delight therein.

David resolveth so to do: 'I will delight,' or solace or recreate myself in thy statutes; this should be his refreshment after business. David had many things to delight in;—the splendour and magnificence of his kingdom; as Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 4:30, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?' His great victories, which Aristotle saith are delightful to all. Τὸ νικᾶν ἡδὺ, οὐ μόνον τοῖς φιλονέικοις ἀλλὰ πᾶσι· φαντασία γὰρ ὑπεροχῆς γίννεται. It is an appearance of excellency (Arist. Rhet. i. cap. 11). Or in his instruments of music; as those, Amos 6:5, 'that chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David.' No; this was not the mirth that he chose for his portion. Wicked men throng their hearts with such delights as these, lest an evil conscience flee upon them; 'but I will delight myself in thy statutes.' He might take comfort in a subordinate way in these things; but the solace of his life, and the true sauce of all his labours, was in the word of God. As David, so Jeremiah, chap. 15:16, 'Thy words were found, and I did eat them; they were unto me as the joy and rejoicing of my heart.' That was the food and the repast of his soul, and he felt more warmth and cherishing in it than any can in their bodily food. So Paul: Rom. 7:22, 'I delight in the law of God in the inward man.' Not to know it only, but to feel the power of it prevailing over his lusts; that was his delight as to the better part of his soul. So it is made a general character of the blessed man: Ps. 1:2, that 'he delighteth in the law of God, and in that law doth he exercise himself day and night.' God's people will delight in his law; it is one of the greatest enjoyments they have on this side heaven, in the time of their absence from God. It is the instrument of all the good that they receive—comfort, strength, quickening.

But now, how do they delight in God's statutes?

1. In reading the word. The eunuch, returning from public worship, was reading a portion of scripture, Acts 8:28. It is good to see with our eyes, and to drink of the fountain ourselves; if it seem dark without the explication of men, God, that sent Philip to the eunuch, will send you an interpreter.

2. In hearing of the word. The command is, James 1:19, 'Wherefore be swift to hear.' The saints have had experiment of the power of it, and therefore delight in it. 'I was glad when they said, Come, let us go up unto the house of the Lord,' Ps. 122:1. You should be glad of these occasions of hearing, not as, with the minstrel, to please the ear, but to warm the heart. Seeing is in heaven, hearing in the churches upon earth; then vision, now hearing.

3. In conferring of it often. What a man delighteth in he will be talking of; so should you at home and abroad: Deut. 6:7, 'Thou shalt be talking of them when thou sittest in thy house, and as thou walkest by the way,' seasoning thy journey. He that would have God to be in his journey, as travelling and walking abroad, should be speaking of divine things.

4. In meditating and exercising his mind upon it: Ps. 1:2, 'He delighteth in the law of God, and in that law doth he meditate day and night.' Delight causeth a pause or consistency of mind: as the glutton rolleth the sweet morsel under his tongue, and is loath to let it go, so a godly man's thoughts will run along with his delight. Clean beasts chew the cud; God's children will be ruminating, going over the word again and again.

5. In practice. This delight is not a bare speculation—so hypocrites have their tastes and their flashes—but in believing, practising, obeying: Ps. 119:14, 'I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies.' Delight breedeth obedience, and is increased and doubled by it. It is not the delight which an ordinary beholder taketh in a rare piece of

painting, merely to admire the art; but the delight which an artist taketh in imitating it, and copying it out. Here in the text it is 'in thy statutes.' A gracious heart is alike affected with the rule as the promise; not only with discoveries of grace, but discoveries of duty.

Now thus it must be ordinarily.

1. The duties of every day must be carried on with delight. This must be our divertisement, and the refreshment of our other labours, that when tired out with the incumbrances of the world, we may look upon reading, meditating, hearing, as our recreation, and the salt and solace of our lives, that other things may go down the better. The labours of the mind do relieve those of the body, and those of the body those of the mind. Ainsworth saith, the word in the text signifieth, 'I will solace and recreate myself;' and Ps. 1:2, 'His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in that law doth he exercise himself day and night,' as was before cited.

2. Especially upon the Lord's day: Isa. 58:13, 'Thou shalt call the sabbath a delight;' call it so, that is, account it so. When our whole time is to be parted into meditation, and prayer, and hearing, and conference, then it is our advantage to lie in the bosom of God all the day long. A bell is kept up with less difficulty when it is once raised; and when the heart is once got up, it is the better kept up in a holy delight in God.

The reasons of it are two—

1. The word of God deserveth it.
2. This delight will be of great use to them.

First, The word of God deserveth it.

1. In regard to the author, they delight in it for the author's sake, because it is the signification of his mind; as a letter from a beloved friend is very welcome to us. Aristotle, mentioning the causes of

delight, saith (Rhet. i. cap. 11), 'Οι ἐρῶντες, καὶ διαλεγόμενοι, καὶ γράφοντες, καὶ ποιοῦντες ἀεὶ τὶ περὶ τοῦ ἐρωμένου χαίρουσιν—lovers are mightily pleased when they hear anything of the party beloved, or receive anything from them, a letter or a token. The word is God's epistle and love-letter to ourselves; it is the more welcome for his sake. The contrary God complaineth of: Hosea 8:12, 'I have written to them the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing.' God is the author, whosoever be the penman; it is a writing from him to us. Now, to be strangers to it, or little conversant about it, argueth some contempt of God; as to slight the letter of a friend showeth little esteem of the writer. But now the saints put it into their bosoms, view it with delight, it is God's epistle.

2. In regard of its own excellency, in three respects; it is—

[1.] Their direction.

[2.] Their support.

[3.] Their charter.

[1.] It is their direction; it is 'a light that shines in a dark place,' 2 Peter 1:19. The world is a dark place, beset with dangers, and ever and anon we are apt to stumble into the pit of destruction, without taking heed to this light. The word discovereth to them evils, that they may see them, repent of them, forsake them; and showeth us our ready way to heaven, that we may walk therein. It discovereth the greatest dangers, and pointeth out the surest way to safety and peace. They are called true laws and good statutes, Neh. 9:13, to show the full proportion that they bear to the soul. Verum and bonum,—truth and goodness, are proper for our most eminent faculties, the understanding and will. It doth a man's heart good to study these statutes. A child of God, that seeth others stumble and fall, how may he stand and bless God for the direction of the word, that God hath given him counsel in his reins, that he hath a clue to

lead him out of those labyrinths in which others have lost their way, and know not know to escape!

[2.] It is their support. The word is κοῖνον ἰατρεῖον, as Basil expresseth it. It is God's shop, from whence they fetch all their cordials in a time of fainting, and so are freed from those fears and discontents and despairing thoughts under which others languish: Ps. 119:50, 'This is my comfort in my affliction, thy word hath quickened me.' When a believer is damped with trouble, and even dead at heart, a promise will revive him again: ver. 92, 'Unless thy law had been my delight, I had perished in my affliction.' And many such like experiences the saints have had. The worth of the word is best known in an evil time. One promise in the word of God doth bear up the heart more than all the arguings and discourses of men, though never so excellent. In time of temptation, in the hour of death, oh, what a reviving is one word of God's mouth!

[3.] It is their charter, that which they have to show for their everlasting hopes. There we have promises of eternal joy and blessedness under the greatest assurance, and this makes way for strong consolation, Heb. 6:18. A man that hath a clear evidence to show for a fair inheritance, it is not irksome to hear it read, or to look over it now and then, as a covetous man is pleased to look into his bills and bonds which he has under hand and seal.

Secondly, This delight will be of great use to them.

1. To draw us off from carnal vanities. We have another delight, and the strength of the soul runneth out in another way; there will not be such room for worldly affections. As fear is cured with fear, the fear of men with the fear of God, so is delight by delight; delight in God's statutes is the cure of delight in worldly things. Love cannot lie idle, it must be occupied one way or another; either carried out to the contentments of the flesh, or else to holy things. Now, if you can find a more noble delight, there is a check upon that which is carnal: Ps.

119:37, 'Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way.' The enlargement of the heart straitens the flesh.

2. It will take off the tediousness of religious exercises. What we delight in is not irksome. In hunting, fowling, and fishing, though there be as much labour as in our ordinary employments, yet we count the toil nothing because of the delight in them. We are very apt to be weary of well-doing, and to tire in a holy course; but now, when it is our delight, it goeth on the more easily. In one sense we must make religion our business, in another, our recreation; our work to prevent slackness, our recreation to prevent tediousness; it is not a task, but a pleasure.

Use 1. This informeth us of the ill choice that many men make of their delights and recreations; they must have cards and dice and foolish mirth to pass away the time, or else idle stories and vain romances. A Christian is everywhere like himself; he showeth himself a Christian in his recreations as well as his business. *Castæ deliciæ meæ sunt scripturæ tuæ*, saith Austin—Lord, my chaste delights are thy Holy Scriptures. If we were as we should be, it would be our recreation to understand our duty, to contemplate the way of reconciliation to God by Christ, and to take a view of our everlasting hopes. Were we seriously persuaded of the benefits which men have by the word, that there is a sure direction to resolve our doubts and our scruples, and the offers of a pardon and a glorious estate by Christ, what need a Christian any other recreation? Will not the sense of God's love and the hopes of heaven make us merry enough? Indeed, because of the weariness of the flesh, we need temporal refreshments; but here should be our great delight, 'I will solace or recreate myself in thy statutes.'

Use 2. Caution to us to fix our delight aright.

1. It is a considerable affection. All the affections depend upon pleasure or pain, delight or grief—the one is proper to the body, the other to the soul—which grow from the contentment or distaste

which we receive from the divers objects which we meet with. If we love, it is for that we find a sweetness in the object beloved; if we hate, we apprehend a trouble in what we hate; if we hope, we promise ourselves a happiness or satisfaction in the possession of the thing hoped for: if we despair, it is because the thing cannot be obtained from which our contentment would arise. Desire is of some good which we judge pleasing. By fear and flight we shun things which we apprehend would breed us vexation. So that, in effect, delight sets all the other affections a-work.

2. It is a choice affection, more proper to fruition than use, and therefore not for the means so much as end, and so reserved for God, who is the last end. There are *fruenta* and *utenda*, God and heavenly things to be enjoyed, but earthly things to be used: for means, those that are in the nearest vicinity to the end, as the law of God and grace: earthly things are to be used with a kind of indifferency, and therefore should have little of our joy; but our solid complacency must be in God, next in the things of God, his law and grace, which are means in the nearest vicinity with our end: Ps. 37:4, 'Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart;' Phil. 4:4, 'Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.'

3. Delight, if not right set, of all the affections, is apt to degenerate. We have a liberty to delight in earthly things; the affection is allowed, the excess is forbidden. Thou mayest delight in the wife of thy youth, in thy children, estate, in the provisions heaped upon thee by the indulgence of God's providence. Pleasure is the sauce of life, to better digest our sorrows. It is allowed us, but it must be well guarded. We are most apt to surfeit of pleasant things, and to miscarry by sweet affections. Sorrow is afflictive and painful, and will in time wear away of itself. Pleasure is ingrained in our natures, born and bred with us; and therefore, though we may delight in the moderate use of the refreshments of the present life, in estate, honour, reputation, yet we should take heed of excess, that our hearts be not overjoyed, and too much taken up about these things. Carnal joy is the drunkenness of the mind; it besotteth us, maketh us unmindful of God, weakens

our esteem of his favour and blessing; it chaineth us to present things. Pleasure is the great witch and sorceress that enchants with the love of the world, maketh us unmindful of the country whence we came, and whither we are going; therefore we should be jealous of our delight, and how we bestow it.

Use 3. To exhort us to this delight in God's statutes, or this spiritual rejoicing.

1. Here is no danger of exceeding; the greatest excesses here are most praiseworthy. In other things we must exercise it with jealousy, feed with fear, rejoice as if we rejoiced not. A man may easily go beyond his bounds when he rejoiceth in the creature; but here enlarge thy heart as much as is possible, and take thy fill of pleasure: Cant 5:1. 'Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' This is ebrietas quæ nos castos facit—chaste flagons: Eph. 5:18, 'Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit.'

2. We shall never be ashamed of these joys: 2 Cor. 1:12, 'Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience,' &c. All carnal joys have a turpitude affixed to them, and therefore affect to lie hid under a veil of secrecy. The world would cry shame of him that would say of his bags or his dishes, Here is my joy. As much as men affect these things, yet they desire to conceal them from the knowledge of others.

3. We shall never be weary of these joys. The delights of the senses become nauseous and troublesome; our natural dispositions become weary and importunate; a man must have shift and change, pleasures refreshed with other pleasures. But these delights add perfection to nature; therefore, when fully enjoyed, they delight most. A good conscience is a continual feast, a dish we are never weary of. The blessed spirits in heaven are never weary of beholding the face of God. God is new and fresh every moment to them. The contemplation of such excellent objects doth not overcharge and weaken the spirits, but doth raise and fortify them. It is true, the corporeal powers being weak, may be tired in such an employment,

as much reading is a weariness to the flesh; but the object doth not grow distasteful, as in carnal things.

How shall we get it?

1. Get a suitableness to the word. Every man's delights are as his principles: Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit.' A man is much discovered by his savour and relish of things. All creatures must have suitable food. There must be a suitableness between the faculty and the object; spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

2. Be in a condition to delight in the word. A guilty soul readeth its own doom there; it revealeth themselves to themselves, accuseth and condemneth them. As Ahab said of Micaiah, 'He prophesieth evil against me,' and therefore could not endure to hear him: John 3:20, 'Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.'

3. Purge the heart from carnal distempers, lust, envy, covetousness, love of pleasures; these are diseases that need other diet than the word. Such persons must have other solaces; they cater for the flesh, to please the senses. An earthly heart will not delight in spiritual things.

Doct. It standeth God's children upon to see that they do not forget the word.

1. What is it to forget the word? A man may remember or forget two ways—notionally and affectively.

[1.] Notionally, when the notions of things formerly known are either altogether or in part worn out: James 1:25, 'He is like one that looks at his natural face in a glass, but goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of person he was.'

[2.] Affectively, when, though he still retain the notions, yet he is not answerably affected, nor doth act according thereunto. Thus the butler did not remember Joseph; that is, did not pity him. Thus God is said not to remember the sins of them that repent, when he doth not punish them, and to forget the afflictions of his people, when he doth not deliver them; and we are said to forget God, Ps. 106:21, when we do not obey him, and to forget his word when we do not 'remember his commandments to do them,' Ps. 103:18. In this place both are intended, the notional and practical remembrance.

2. The reasons why we should not forget his word.

[1.] Meditation will fail else. A barren, lean soul is unfit to enlarge itself in holy thoughts, shall never grow rich in the spiritual understanding: Col. 3:16, 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly, in all knowledge,' &c. Men of small substance grow rich by continual saving, and holding together what they have gotten; but if they spend it as fast as they get it, they cannot be rich: Luke 2:19, 'Mary kept all these sayings, and pondered them in her heart.'

[2.] Delectation will grow cold, unless the memory be rubbed up ever and anon. When they fainted under affliction, the cause is intimated: Heb. 12:5, 'Have ye forgotten the exhortation that speaketh unto you as unto children?' Distrust in straits is from the same source: Mark 8:17, 'They remembered not the miracle of the loaves, for their hearts were hardened. Ye see and hear, and do not remember. David was under great discomfort till he 'remembered the years of the light hand of the Most High,' Ps. 77:10; Lam. 3:21, 'This I recall to mind, therefore I have hope.'

[3.] Practice and conscience of obedience will grow more remiss. Nothing keepeth the heart in a holy tenderness so much as a presence of the truth; and when we can bring our knowledge to act, and have it for our use upon all occasions, it urgeth us to practice: James 1:25, being 'not a forgetful hearer, but a doer.' Most of our sins are sins of forgetfulness and incogitancy. Peter would never have

been so bold and daring, and done what he did, if he had remembered Christ's prediction. The text saith, Luke 22:61, 'When he remembered, he wept bitterly.' A bad memory is the occasion of much mischief to the soul, when we do not call truths to mind in their season, and when fit occasion and opportunity is offered. Memory is a handmaid to understanding and conscience, and keeps truths, and brings them forth when called for.

Use is to press us to caution. Let us not forget the word. Helps to memory are:—

1. Attention. Men remember what they heed and regard: Prov. 4:21, 'Attend to my sayings; keep them in the midst of thy heart.' Where there is attention, there will be retention. Oh! lay up truths with much earnestness and care. Sensitive memory is seated in the hinder part of the head, as one would say in a chamber backward, from the noise of the street. Now, oh! lay up truth safe, and lay it out whenever you have need. But rational memory lieth near the understanding and conscience, in the midst of thine heart. Reverence in the admission of the word helps us in the keeping of it: Heb. 2:1, 'Let us take heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time they slip from us.' If we did receive it with more heed, we would retain it with more constancy; lay them up, keep them choicely.

2. Affection, that is a great friend to memory. What we esteem most we best remember. *Omnia quæ curant senes meminerunt*—an old man will not forget where he laid his bag of gold. Delight and love will renew and revive the object upon our thoughts. Here in the text we have this truth asserted, 'I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.' Affection to truths cometh from the application. In a public edict a man will be sure to carry away what is proper to his case.

3. Meditation. We must be often viewing and meditating of what we have laid up in the memory. It availeth not to the health of the body to eat much, but to digest what is eaten. Tumultuary reading and

hearing, without meditation, is like greedy swallowing much meat. When little is thought on, it doth not turn to profit. This concocteth and digesteth what we have heard. The more a thing is revolved in the mind, the deeper impression it maketh.

4. Beware of inuring the mind to vain thoughts; for this distracts it, and hindereth the impression of things upon it. The face is not seen in running waters; nor can things be written in the memory, unless the mind be close and fixed. Lead is capable of engraving, because it is firm and solid; but quicksilver, because it is fluid, will not admit it. An inconsistent, wandering mind reapeth little fruit from what is read or heard.

5. Order is a help to memory. Heads of doctrine are as cells wherein to bestow all things that are heard from the word. He that is well instructed in the principles of religion will most easily and firmly remember divine truths. Methodus est catena memoriae, to link truths one to another, that we may consider them in their proportion.

6. Get a lively sense of what you hear or read, and you will remember it by a good token: Ps. 119:93, 'I will never forget thy precepts, for by them thou hast quickened me.' They that are quickened by a sermon will never forget such a sermon.

7. Holy conference. The speaking often of good things keeps them in the heart; and the keeping of them there causeth us to speak to those that are about.

8. Get the memory sanctified, as well as other faculties, and pray for the Spirit; for that faculty is corrupted as well as others.

SERMON III

Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.—VER. 17.

IN the former part we heard of the virtue and excellency of the word, and therefore how much the saints desire to understand it, meditate of it, speak of it, and transfer it into their practice. Now, whosoever will resolve upon such a course, will necessarily be put upon prayer; for mark how David's purposes and prayers are intermingled, I will, and I will; and then presently prayeth again, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word.'

In this request observe—

1. It is generally expressed, together with his own relation to God, deal bountifully with thy servant.
2. It is particularly explained wherein he would have this bounty expressed:—

[1.] In the prorogation of his life, that I may live.

[2.] In the continuance of his grace, and keep thy word; the one in order to the other. David doth not simply pray for life, but in order to such an end; and the general request concerneth both parts, yea, rather the latter than the former, that whilst I live I may beep thy word, as counting that to be the greatest benefit or argument of God's bounty, to have a heart framed to the obedience of his will.

I might observe many things; as (1.) What a great honour it is to be God's servant. David, a great king, giveth himself this title, 'thy servant;' and Constantine counted it a greater honour to be a Christian than to be head of the empire. (2.) That all we have or expect cometh from God's bounty to us. So doth David express himself, 'Deal bountifully with thy servant;' as intimating not only the measure, but the rise and source of what he expected from God.

(3.) That among all the benefits which we expect from the bounty of God, this is one of the greatest, to have an heart to 'keep his word.'

(4.) God's word must not only be understood, but obeyed; for this is the meaning of keeping the word: John 14:21, 'He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them,' &c. Hath implieth knowledge. We must have them before we can keep them; but when we have them, we must keep them, and do what we know. But omitting all these points, which will be more fitly discussed elsewhere, I shall only point out two lessons:—

1. The cause of life, and that is God's bounty.

2. The end and scope of life; God's service.

First, The cause of life, deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live. Observe—

Doct. The prorogation of our lives is not the fruit of our merits, but the free grace of God.

1. Long life is in itself a blessing, and so promised, though more in the Old Testament than in the New, when eternity was more sparingly revealed. That it is promised as a blessing is evident: Prov. 28:16, 'He that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days.' And in the fifth commandment: Exod. 20:12, 'That thy days may be long in the land of the living.' So Ps. 91:16, 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;' not only heaven hereafter, but long life here. It is in itself a benefit, a mercy to the godly and the wicked. To the godly, that they may not be gathered till ripe; for God hath set a mark upon it: Prov. 16:31, 'The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in a way of righteousness.' It is some kind of resemblance of God, who is the Ancient of days. It was a title of honour, 'Paul the aged.' It giveth many advantages of glorifying God, and doing good to others. It is no small benefit to those that employ it well. To those that are in a state of sin, the continuance of life is a mercy, as it affords them time to repent and reconcile themselves to God. And

the contrary is threatened as a curse: Eccles. 8:13, 'He shall not prolong his days, because he feareth not God.' For wicked men to have the sun go down at noon-day, and to be cut off before their preparations or expectations, and so thrown headlong into hell by a speedy death, is a great misery.

2. It is such a mercy as we have by God's gift. He is interested in it upon a double account.

[1.] There is a constant providential influence and supportation, by which we are maintained in life, and without which all creatures vanish into nothing; as the beams of the sun are no longer continued in the air than the sun shineth, or as the impress is retained no longer upon the waters than the seal is kept on. When God suspendeth his providential influence and supportation, all doth vanish and disappear: Heb. 1:3, 'He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' as a weighty thing is held up in the air by the hand that sustaineth it, or the vessels of the house hang upon 'a nail in a sure place.' God, that made all things by his word, upholdeth all things by the same word. A word made the world, and can undo the world. So Acts 17:28, 'In him we live and move and have our being.' We cannot draw breath without him for a moment; as the pipe hath no breath but what the musician puts into it. We can neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor drink, without this intimate support and influence from him. The scripture sets it out by a man's holding a thing in his hand: Job 12:10, 'In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.' Now, if God do but loosen his hand, his almighty grasp, all cometh to nothing: Job 6:9. 'Let him loose his hand, and cut me off.' Life, and the comforts of life, depend upon God in every kind.

[2.] There is a watchful eye and care of his providence over his people, whereby their life is preserved against all the dangers wherewith it is assaulted. God taketh care of all his creatures: Ps. 36:6, 'He preserveth man and beast;' but man much more: 1 Cor. 9:9, 'Doth God take care of oxen?' He dealeth bountifully with his

enemies, but much more doth he 'preserve the feet of his saints,' 1 Sam. 2:9. The care of his providence hath its degrees; it is more intensively exercised about things of worth and value, and most of all about the life of his saints. When Satan had a commission to exercise Job, first his person was exempted: Job 1:12, 'Upon himself put not forth thy hand;' next his life: Job 2:6, 'Behold he is in thy hand, but save his life.' A godly man hath an invisible guard and hedge round about him. We are not sensible of it; but Satan, who is our enemy, he is sensible of it: when he would make his assault, he cannot find a gap and breach, till God open it to him. Both these notions are sufficient to possess us how much God is interested in prolonging our lives.

3. The next thing is, that we have it by the mere bounty and free grace of God. It is not from his strict remunerative justice, but his kind love and tender mercy. The air we breathe in, we have it not by merit, but by grace: Lam. 3:22, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' The reasons are two:—

[1.] We deserve nothing at his hand.

[2.] We deserve the contrary.

(1.) We cannot merit of God: Job. 22:2, 'Can a man be profitable to God, as he that is wise is profitable to himself?' Job 35:7, 'If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he at thy hand?' Whatever God doth for creatures, he doth it freely, because he cannot be obliged or pre-engaged by us. In innocency Adam could impetrare, but not mereri—obtain it by covenant, not challenge by desert. Therefore God conferreth as freely as he createth.

(2.) If God would deal with us upon terms of merit, we cannot give him a valuable compensation for temporal life—Gen. 32:10, 'I am less than the least of all thy mercies.' None of God's mercies can simply be said to be little; whatever cometh from the great God

should be great in our value and esteem; as a small remembrance from a great king. Yet in comparison between the blessings, one may be said to be least, the other greatest. Temporal life with its appendages, compared with spiritual and eternal, is in the rank of his least mercies. God giveth life to the plants, to the trees, to the beasts of the field; and yet, when we and our deservings come into the balance, we are found wanting: 'I am not worthy,' &c. All our righteousness doth not deserve the air we breathe in. It is so defective, if a man were to pay for his life, it could not merit the continuance of it.

[2.] We have deserved the contrary; we have put ourselves out of God's protection by sin. Death waylaid us when we were in our mother's womb; and as soon as we were born, there was a sentence in force against us: 'Death came upon all, for that all have sinned,' Rom. 5:12; and still we continue the forfeiture, and every day provoke God to cut us off; so that it is a kind of pardoning mercy that continueth us every moment. Of this we are most sensible in case of danger and sickness, when there is but a step between us and death; for then the old bond beginneth to be put in suit, and God cometh to execute the sentence of the law; and deliverance in such a case is called forgiveness and remission, and that even to the wicked and impenitent. As Ps. 78:38, 'And he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not.' It is called a remission improperly, because it was a reprieve for the time from the temporal judgment; it was not an executing the sentence, or a destroying the sinner presently; and that not from anything in the sinner, but from God's pity over him as his creature. But now a godly man hath a true pardon renewed at such time, and he is 'loved from the grave;' for so it is in the Hebrew: Isa. 38:17, 'Thou hast loved my soul from the pit of destruction.' To be loved out of a danger, and loved out of a sickness, oh! that is a blessed thing.

Use 1. To acknowledge the Lord's goodness in these common mercies. We did not give life to ourselves, and we cannot keep it in ourselves. God made us, and God keepeth us. It was not our parents

that fashioned us in the womb; they could not tell what the child would prove, male or female, beautiful or deformed. They could not tell the number or posture of the veins, or bones, or muscles; it was all the curious workmanship of a wise God; and it is the same God that hath kept us hitherto: Isa. 46:3, 4, 'By me ye are borne from the belly, and carried from the womb; even to old age I am he, and even to hoar hairs will I carry you,' &c. We have been supported and tenderly handled by God, as parents and nurses carry their younglings in their arms. Many times wanton children are ready to scratch the faces of those that carry them; so have we put many affronts upon him, yet to the very last doth he carry us in the arms of his providence. In infancy we were not in a capacity to know the God of our mercies, and to look after him; but nevertheless he looked after us. Afterwards we knew how to grieve him and offend him, long before how to love and serve him. Oh, how early did our naughty hearts appear! and all along how little have we done for God, 'in whom we live and move and have our being!' 'He is not far from us,' in the effects of his care and providence; but we are far from him by the distance of our thoughts and affections, by the carnal bent of our hearts. It is a good morning exercise for us humbly and thankfully to consider of his continual mercies. For God's 'compassions are new every morning,' Lam. 3:22—as fresh as if never tired with former acts of grace, nor wearied with former offences. It is some recompense for the time of sleep; half our time passeth away, and we do not show one act of love and kindness unto God; therefore, as soon as we are awakened we should be with God, Ps. 139:18. How many are gone down to the chambers of death since the last night!

2. It quickeneth us to love and serve God, who is 'the strength of our lives, and the length of our days,' Deut. 30:20. Thy life is wholly in God's hands. Man cannot add a cubic to his stature, nor make one hair white or black at his own pleasure. It is the Lord's providential influence that keepeth thee alive; in point of gratitude, thou shouldst serve him: 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live.' But I may urge also, in point of hope, God's servants can best recommend themselves to his care and keeping by prayer, and expect to walk

continually under divine protection. Those that provoke God continually, they may be continued by the bounty and indulgence of his providence; but yet they can look for no such thing, and in the issue it proveth to be in wrath, for their sins are more and judgments greater: it is but to 'treasure up wrath to the day of wrath.'

3. If life temporal be the fruit of God's bounty, much more life eternal: Rom. 6:23, 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.' One is wages, the other a gift.

4. It informeth us that we may lawfully pray for life, with submission to the will of God, and that death may not come upon us suddenly, contrary to the ordinary course of nature. I was loath to make a distinct doctrine of it, yet I could not decline the giving out of this truth.

How will this stand with our desires of dissolution, and willingness to depart and to be with Christ, which certainly all Christians that believe eternity should cherish in their hearts?

To this I answer—1. By concession; that we are to train up ourselves in an expectation of our dissolution, that we may be willing when the time is come, and God hath no more work for us to do in the world; we are to awaken our desires after the presence of Christ in heaven, to show both our faith in him and love to him. Since Christ was willing to come down to us, though it were to meet with shame and pain, why should we be loath to return to him? Jacob's spirit revived when he saw the waggons which Joseph sent to carry him. Death is the chariot to carry you to Christ, and therefore it should not be unwelcome to us.

2. By correction; though it be lawful and expedient to desire death, yet we are not anxiously to long after it till the time come; there may be sin in desiring death, as when we grow weary of life out of desperation, and the tiresomeness of the cross; and there may be grace in desiring life, that we may keep his word, longer express our

gratitude to him here in the world, to mourn for sin, to promote his glory. More fully to make this evident to you, I shall show how we may desire death, how not. To answer in several propositions:—

[1.] There is a great deal of difference between serious desires and passionate expressions. The desires of the children of God are deliberate and resolved, conceived upon good grounds, after much struggling with flesh and blood to bring their hearts to it. Carnal men are loath that God should take them at their word; as he in the fable that called for death, and when he came, desired him to help him up with his burden. Alas! they do not consider what it is to be in the state of the dead, and to come unprovided and unfurnished into God's presence. We often wish ourselves in our graves; but if God should take us at our word, we would make many pauses and exceptions. Men that in their miseries call for death, when sickness cometh will run to the physician, and promise many things if they may be recovered. None more unwilling to die than those that in a passion wish for death.

[2.] We must carefully look to the grounds of these wishes and desires. First, Carnal wishes for death arise either—(1.) Out of violent anger and a pet against providence; as Jonah 4:8, 'The sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than live.' The children of Israel murmured when they felt the famine of the wilderness: Exod. 16:3, 'And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt,' &c. When men are vexed with the world, they look upon death as a relief, to take vengeance upon God, to deprive him of a servant. (2.) In deep sorrow; as Job 3:3; Elijah, 1 Kings 19:4: 'He requested for himself that he might die; and he said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers.' (3.) From the peevishness of fond and doting love: 2 Sam. 18:33, 'And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O Absalom, my son, would God I had died for thee! O Absalom, my son, my son!' like the wives of the East

Indians, that burn themselves to follow their dead husbands. (4.) From distrust and despair, when the evil is too hard to be resisted or endured: Job 7:15, 'My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than my life.' In all these cases it is but a shameful retreat from the conflict and burden of the present life, from carnal irksomeness under the calamity, or a distrust of God's help. There may be murder in a rash wish, if it proceed from a vexed heart. These are but froward thoughts, not a sanctified resolution. Secondly, Such desires of death and dissolution as are lawful, and must be cherished, come from a good ground, from a heart crucified and deadened to the world, and set on things above: Col. 3:1, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.' From a competent assurance of grace: Rom. 8:23, 'Even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' From some blessed experience of heavenly comforts, having tasted the fruits, clusters of Canaan, they desire to be there. So Simeon: Luke 2:29, 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;' the eyes of his faith, as well as the eyes of his body. Now, Lord, I do but wait, as a merchantman richly laden desireth to be at his port. A great love to Christ excites desires to be with him: Phil. 1:23, 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better;' Phil. 3:19, 20, 'For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.' They long to see and be where he is; heart and head should be together. Weariness of sin, and a great zeal for God's glory, are powerful incentives in the saints: Rom. 7:23, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' They would be in heaven, that they may sin no more.

[3.] You must look to the end; not have a blind notion of heaven, and look for a Turkish paradise full of ease and plenty; a carnal heaven, as the Jews looked for a carnal Messiah; but for a state of perfect union and communion with the blessed and holy God.

[4.] The manner must be regarded; it must be done with submission, Phil. 1:24; otherwise we encroach upon God's right, and would deprive him of a servant without his leave. A Christian will die and live as the Lord willeth; if it be the Lord's pleasure, a believer is satisfied with long life: Ps. 91:16, 'With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation;' he will 'wait till the change come,' when God shall give him a discharge by his own immediate hand, or by enemies. God knoweth how to choose the fittest time, otherwise we know not what we ask.

Secondly, Now let me speak of the scope of our lives. David simply doth not desire life, but in order to service. The point is—

That if we desire long life, we should desire it to glorify God by obedience to his word.

Let me give you some instances, then reasons.

1. Instances: Ps. 118:17, 'I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.' This was David's hope in the prolongation of life, that he should have farther opportunity to honour God; and this argument he urgeth to God when he prayeth for life: Ps. 6:5, 'For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?' It would be better for him to be with God; but then the life is worth the having, when the extolling of Christ is the main scope at which we aim. So Paul: Phil. 1:20, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death,' &c. Paul was in some hesitation which he should choose, life or death; and he determineth of both as God might be magnified by either of them, and so was at a point of indifference. If God should give him his option or wish, he would give the case back again to God, to determine as it might be most for his service and glory. He was not swayed by any low and base motives of contentment in the world, or any low and creature enjoyments; these are contemptible things to

come into the balance with everlasting glory. It was only his service in the gospel, and the public good of the church, that made the case doubtful.

Reas. 1. This is the perfection of our lives, and that which maketh it to be life indeed. Communion with God is the vitality of it, without which we are rather dead than alive. Life natural we have in common with the beasts and plants; but in keeping the word, we live the life of God: Eph. 4:18, 'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God.' To natural men it is a gloomy thing; but to believers this is the life of life, and that which is the joy of their hearts. To increase in stature, and to grow bulky, that is the life of plants; the greatest and biggest of the kind are most perfect. To live and enjoy pleasures without remorse, that is the perfection and life of beasts, that have no conscience, that shall not be called to an account. To gratify present interests, and to be able to turn and wind worldly affairs, that is the life of carnal men, that have no sense of eternity. But the perfection of the life of man as a reasonable creature is to measure our actions by God's word, and to refer them to his glory.

Reas. 2. It is the end of our lives that God may be served: 'All things are by him, and through him, and to him,' Rom. 11:36; angels, men, beasts, inanimate creatures. He expects more from men than from beasts, and from saints than from men; and therefore life by them is not to be desired and loved but for this end: Rom. 14:6–8, 'He that regardeth a day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord eateth not, and giveth God thanks: for none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.'

Use 1. For reproof. Every man desireth life. The whole world would all and every one of them put up this request to God, 'Deal

bountifully with thy servant, that I may live;' but there is not one man in a hundred that considereth why he should live. Some would live to please the flesh, and to wallow in the delights of the present world; a brutish wish! An heathen could say, he doth not deserve the name of a man that would spend his time in pleasure one day. These would not leave their husks and their hog trough. This was not David's desire, but that he might keep the law, and faithfully worship God.

Some, again, desire to see their children well bestowed, or to free their estate from incumbrance; this is distrust, as if we did not leave a God behind us, who hath promised to be a father of the fatherless, and to take care of our little ones. Can we venture ourselves in God's hands, and can we not venture our families with him, whose goodness extendeth to all his creatures? Some are loath to leave such as are dear to them, wife and children and friends; and is not God better, and Christ better? These must be loved in God and after God. We set friends in the place of God and Christ, when we can be content to be absent longer from God merely upon this ground, because we are loath to be separated from our friends. 'He that loveth father and mother, and husband and wife, more than me, is not worthy of me,' saith Christ. Oh, how far are these from any Christian affection! Surely to a believer it is a piece of self-denial to be kept out of heaven longer; therefore it must be sweetened by some valuable compensation; something there must be to calm the mind contentedly to spare the enjoyment of it for a while. Now, next to the good pleasure of God, which is the reason of reasons, there is some benefit which we pitch upon. Nothing is worthy to be compared but our service, if God may have glory, if our lives may do good. A gracious heart must be satisfied with gracious reasons. Some may desire life, because they are dismayed with the terrors of death; but this is unbelief. Hath not Christ delivered us not only from the hurt of death, but the fear of death? Heb. 2:14, 'And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' Where is your faith? 'Death is yours,' 1 Cor. 3:22. It is a sin simply to desire life; but look to the causes and ends of it.

Use 2. It directeth us how to dispose of our lives. For this end take a few considerations.

[1.] This life is not to be valued but by opportunities of service to God. It is not who liveth most plentifully, but most serviceably to God's glory: Acts 13:36, 'David, after he had served his generation, by the will of God he fell asleep.' Every one was made to serve God in his generation, and hath his office and use as an instrument of divine providence, from the king to the peasant. We are undone if the creatures, made to serve us, should fail in their season. We were made to serve God in our season.

[2.] This service is determined by the course of God's providence. He is the great master of the scenes, that appointeth us what part to act, and sets to every man his calling and state of life. John 17:4, our Saviour saith, 'I have finished the work thou hast given me to do.' We must not be our own carvers, prescribe to God at what rate we will be maintained, nor what kind of work we will perform. Those that are free may covenant with you, and make their bargain, what kind of service they will undertake; but we are at God's absolute dispose, to be used as vessels of honour or dishonour, as fitted and disposed.

[3.] In the management of this work we must measure our actions by God's word, and refer them to his glory. By God's word: Ps. 119:105, 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths.' His glory: Col. 3:17, 'And whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.'

[4.] Death shall not prevent us, till we have ended our appointed service. As long as God hath work for us to do, he will maintain life and strength: Gal. 1:15, 'Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.' The decree taketh date from the womb. God frames parts and temper; God rocketh us in our cradles, taketh care of us in our infancy, and all the turns of our lives.

[5.] If God will use us to a great age, we must be content. You may adorn your profession, and bring forth fruit in old age. The longest life is too short to honour God: Ps. 92:13, 'Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God.' We should count it our happiness to be still used, and that we are fully rewarded by being employed in further service.

[6.] Life must be willingly laid down when we cannot keep it but with forsaking the world: Luke 14:26, 'If any man come unto me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.'

[7.] The life of eternity must be subordinate to this great end, the glory of God; our desire of it must be, that we may be to the praise of God.

SERMON IV

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.—VER. 18.

THE heathens thought that man had not a power over his life, but a power over his actions—*Quod vivamus, Deorum munus est; quod bene vivamus, nostrum*. But the Psalmist acknowledged God in both: 'Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy law;' that he could not live nor keep the word without God's grace. This latter he amplifieth in this verse, that he was so far from keeping it, that he could not so much as know it savingly and practically without divine grace: 'Lord, open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Here is—

1. A request, 'open thou mine eyes.'

2. The reason, from the end, benefit, and fruit of it, 'that I may,' or then I shall, 'behold wondrous things out of thy law.'

In which reason is intimated the necessity of divine illumination, and then the profit of it.

1. The necessity, that I may behold, &c.—i.e., otherwise I cannot.

2. The profit, then I shall behold wondrous things out of thy law.

Doct. 1. That we need that God should open our eyes, if we would have a right understanding of his word.

1. What is meant by opening the eyes.

2. The necessity of such a work in order to a right understanding of the word of God.

First, What is meant by opening the eyes. Before I come to the particular explication of the terms, let me premise two observations.

1. The saints do not complain of the obscurity of the law, but of their own blindness. The Psalmist doth not say, 'Lord, make a plainer law,' but, 'Lord, open mine eyes.' Blind men might as well complain of God that he doth not make a sun whereby they might see. The word is 'A light that shineth in a dark place,' 2 Peter 1:19. There is no want of light in the scripture, but there is a veil of darkness upon our hearts; so that if in this clear light we cannot see, the defect is not in the word, but in ourselves.

2. The light which they beg is not anything besides the word. When God is said to enlighten us, it is not that we should expect new revelations, but that we may see the wonders in his word, or get a clear sight of what is already revealed. Those that vent their own dreams under the name of the Spirit and divine light, they do not give you mysteria, but monstra, portentous opinions; not show you the wondrous things of God's law, but the prodigies of their own

brain; unhappy abortives, that die as soon as they come to light: Isa. 8:20, 'To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' The light which we have is not without the word, but by the word.

Now to the phrase. The Hebrew signifieth 'unveil mine eyes.' There is a double work—negative and positive: there is a taking away the veil, and an infusion of light. Paul's cure of his natural blindness is a fit emblem of our cure of spiritual blindness: Acts 9:18, 'Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales, and he received sight forthwith.' First the scales fall from our eyes, and then we receive sight.

1. There is a taking away the veil before we can have a true discerning of the mysteries that are revealed in the word of God: 2 Cor. 3:14, 15, the apostle, speaking of the Jews, saith, 'But their minds were blinded; for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away, in the reading of the Old Testament; which veil is done away in Christ: but even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts.' Now this veil is diverse.

[1.] The veil of ignorance. Though man hath reason, and is capable of understanding the sense and importance of the words that are used about the mysteries of godliness, yea, and the matter too, yet he gets not the saving knowledge of them by his natural abilities. There is a grammatical knowledge and a spiritual knowledge; a man may know things grammatically and literally that is ignorant of them spiritually; as a child may read the letters and words that doth not conceive of the sense. So a man may know what is said concerning God and Christ, and sin and grace, the vanity of the creature, the excellency of heaven, and have yet no saving knowledge of these things; and therefore the scripture useth the expression that they oversee in seeing; as Acts 28:26, 'Hearing, ye shall hear, and not understand; seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive.' Though truths are never so plainly delivered, never so powerfully pressed, and though they are capable to understand the words, yet they do not take the

truth into their hearts, so as to profit by it. So Deut. 29:2–4, 'Ye have seen,' yet 'ye have not an heart to see.' Most will declaim against the vanity of the creature and evil of sin; but they do not see with an affective heart-piercing light; they have on them the veil of spiritual ignorance.

[2.] The veil of carnal knowledge and wisdom, that puffeth up, 1 Cor. 8:1, 2, by which, seeing not, we think we see. This is a great hindrance to the entertaining of the word. So Christ telleth the Pharisees, who were conceited of their own knowledge, John 9:39, 'For judgment am I come into this world, that they which see not might see, and they which see might be made blind.' The Pharisees were the rabbis of the age, the most seeing and learned men of that time. Carnal men are puffed up with a conceit of their own abilities, and so are obstructed by them from profiting by the gospel.

[3.] The veil of prejudice and corrupt affections. The passions of the mind, love and fear, desire and anger, hinder us from judging aright in the things of God. Our hearts are overcast with strong affections to the world, and so cannot clearly judge either of practical truths or of the controversies of the age. Not of practical truths: When Christ had taught that they 'could not serve God and mammon,' it is said, Luke 16:14, 'And the Pharisees, that were covetous, derided him.' Holy mortifying truths are displeasing to a carnal ear, though they be represented with never so much evidence. How will men distinguish themselves out of their duty! They shift, and stretch, and turn and wind hither and thither, and prove truth to be no truth, rather than part with their lusts. So present truths, as the apostle calls them, 2 Peter 1:12, when the dust of interest is raised, are not discerned. The orthodoxy of the world is usually an age too short: 2 Cor. 4:4, 'The god of this world hath blinded their eyes.'

[4.] The veil of carnal sense: 2 Peter 1:9, 'He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off.' There are so many mists and clouds in the lower world, that men cannot outsee time, and without the prospective of faith have a sight of eternity. Nature is short-sighted,

so inured to present things that we receive no light concerning things to come. These are the scales that are upon our eyes.

2. There is an infusion of light, without which men of excellent wit and sharp understanding in other things are stark blind in the things of God. What this light is will appear by the degrees of knowledge and the uses of this light.

[1.] The degrees of knowledge.

(1.) In some there is a simple nescience, both of terms or notions, and things, as in those that have not a revelation, or have not regarded it when the revelation is made. As the Gentiles, that have not a revelation: Eph. 4:18, 'Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.' Or rude and ignorant Christians, that have not the advantage of education, so as to understand the notions in which the doctrine of God is propounded: Isa. 28:9, 10, 'Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts: for precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.' So sottish and brutish are some, that a man had need teach them as he teacheth little children, letter after letter, and line after line, little good done.

(2.) In others there is a grammatical knowledge but not a spiritual, a repeating things by rote, a talking of all that a Christian enjoyeth.

(3.) Besides the grammatical knowledge, there is a dogmatical knowledge, when the truths of the word are not only understood, but begin to settle into an opinion that we bustle for in the world. An opinionative receiving of the truth is different from a saving receiving of the truth. Many are orthodox, or have so much judgment and knowledge as to hold the truth strictly, but the heart is not possessed with the life and power of it. Those are intended in Rom.

2:20, 'An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.' And such are described 2 Tim. 3:8, 'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.' It is not to be imagined that this is always in design, though many times carnal men swim with the stream, and take up with the opinions that are current in their age; but also out of conviction of judgment; there is somewhat of conscience in it. A sound judgment is a different thing from a sound heart. The truths of God have great evidence with them; and therefore a rational man, being helped with some common work of the Spirit, may close with them, though they have no experience of the power and prevailing influence of them.

(4.) Besides this dogmatical knowledge, by which we see round about the compass of truths revealed in the word, there is a gracious illumination when men are taught so as drawn to God, John 6:44, 45, and they do so understand Christ's doctrine as to apply and make a right use of it; such a knowledge as is called not only sight, but taste: 1 Peter 2:3, 'If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious;' and a feeling of what we understand: Phil. 1:9, 'And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.' This sense and experimental knowledge is that which the saints seek after.

[2.] The uses of this spiritual illumination.

(1.) To give us a clear sight of the truths of God.

(2.) An applicative sight.

(3.) An affective sight.

(4.) A transforming sight.

(5.) Such a sense of the truth as is prevalent over lusts and interests.

(1.) A clear sight of the truths of God. Others have but an hearsay knowledge, gathered out of books and sermons, and the common report which is made of Christ; but he that is divinely enlightened drinks of the fountain, and so his draught is more fresh and sweet. They do not talk of things by rote after others, but it is written upon their hearts: Heb. 8:10, 'I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts;' and so groweth more intimate and satisfactory, and moving upon them.

(2.) An applicative sight; not only knowledge, but prudence: Prov. 8:12, 'I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence.' Wisdom is the knowledge of principles; prudence is an ability to apply them to our comfort and use, that we may know it for our good, Job 5:27. Many are right in generals; but the Spirit doth not only reveal the truths of the gospel, but applieth those truths to awaken the conscience that was asleep in sin. Many men that are unrenewed may be stored with general truths concerning the misery of man, redemption by Christ, the privileges of a Christian; but they do not reflect the light of these truths upon themselves, so as to consider their own case; and so it serveth rather for matter of opinion and discourse than for life and conversation; it is not directive.

(3.) An affective sight: Prov. 2:10, 'When wisdom entereth upon thy heart,' which is the seat of affections, it stirs up in the soul answerable motions to every truth; whereas when truths rest in empty barren notions, without feeling and an answerable touch upon the heart, the knowledge of them is like a winter's sun, that shineth, but warmeth not; the misery of man is not affective, and doctrines of redemption by Christ are apprehended without any joy and relish.

(4.) A transforming sight: 2 Cor. 3:18, 'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' It is a light that is both directive and persuasive. A man may hear the gospel $\nu\omicron\mu\iota\kappa\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$, when it is only known as a rule, not as a means to convey the Spirit; whereas a believer hears the law $\epsilon\tilde{\upsilon}\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda\iota\kappa\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$. The

apostle preferreth the gospel above the law in the afore-mentioned place, for comfortableness, perspicuity, efficacy, &c.

(5.) It is a light that prevaieth over our lusts and interest, such a light as hath fire in it to destroy lusts: 1 John 2:3, 4, 'He that saith I know him, and doth not keep his commandments, is a liar.' A true knowledge and sight of God is able to bridle lusts and purify the conscience. Therefore it is said, 'He that doth evil hath not seen God,' 3 John 11; hath not a true sight, whatever speculations he may have about the nature of God. Other light doth not check and control vicious desires; reason is not restored to its dominion: Rom. 1:18, the reputed wise men of the world 'held the truth in unrighteousness.' Truth may talk its fill, but can do nothing; as a man that is bound hand and foot may rave and evaporate his passions, but cannot relieve himself from the oppressor or the force that he is under.

Secondly, Reasons that show the necessity of this work.

1. Spiritual blindness is natural to us, as that man that was blind from his birth, John 9:1. We are not all born blind in body, but all in mind. By tasting the tree of knowledge, all Adam's sons have lost their knowledge. Satan hath brought a greater shame upon us than Nahash the Ammonite would have brought upon the men of Jabesh-Gilead in putting out their right eyes. The eye of the soul is put out, so as we cannot see the light that shineth in the word. By the fall we lost the true and perfect light of reason, but retain the pride of reason. It is no small part of our blindness that we cannot endure to hear of it: Rev. 3:17, 'Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.' Man desireth to be thought sinful rather than weak, and will sooner own a wickedness in morals than a weakness in intellectuals. Men are dishonest out of choice, and therefore think there is more of liberty and bravery in it; but to be simple argueth imperfection; Job 11:12, 'Vain man would be accounted wise, though man be born like a wild-ass's colt;' not only for untamedness and affectation of liberty, but for

rudeness and grossness of conceit; yet man would be accounted wise. The Pharisees took it ill that Christ charged them with blindness: John 9:40, 'Are we blind also?' We all affect the reputation of wisdom, more than the reality; that is the reason why we are so touchy in point of error; we can easier brook a sin reprov'd than an error tax'd. Till we have spiritual eye-salve, we do not know it, and will not hear of this blindness, Rev. 3:17. It is a degree of spiritual knowledge to know that we know nothing.

2. Observe how much spiritual blindness is worse than bodily. Those that are under bodily blindness are glad of a remedy, glad of a guide.

[1.] Glad of a remedy. How feelingly doth that man speak, Mark 10:51, 'What wouldst thou have me to do? Lord, that mine eyes may be opened.' Those that are blind spiritually are not for a remedy; not only ignorant, but unteachable; and so their blindness groweth upon them; to their natural, there is an adventitious blindness. If we cannot keep out the light, we rage against it.

[2.] Glad of a guide; as Elymas the sorcerer, when he was stricken blind, looked about for somebody to lead him by the hand, Acts 13:11. But the blind world cannot endure to be directed, or 'the blind lead the blind, and both fall into the ditch.' He that prophesieth of strong wine is the teacher of this people, saith the prophet. Men love those that gratify their lusts and humours: let one come soundly, and declare the counsel and will of God to them, he is distasted.

3. We cannot help ourselves out of this misery without God's help. Our incapacity is best understood by opening that noted place, 1 Cor. 2:14, 'The natural man receiveth not the things that are of God, for they are folly to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' Let us a little open that place: ἄνθρωπος ψυχικός, 'the souly man,' that is, a man considered in his pure naturals. Jude 19; ψυχικοί, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες, 'sensual, having not the Spirit.' However, he useth the best word by which a natural man can be described; he doth not say σάρκικοι, not only those that are

brutish and depraved by vicious habits, but take nature in its excellency, soul-light in its highest splendour and perfection, though the man be not absolutely given up to vile affections. Well, it is said of him that he neither doth nor can receive the things of God, οὐδέχεται, and οὐ δύναται γνῶναι. The τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, 'the things of the Spirit,' are such truths as depend upon mere revelation, and are above the reach and knowledge of nature. There are τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, 'things of God,' that may be known by a natural light: Rom. 1:19, 'That which may be known of God, is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them;' but τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, things revealed in the word, though a natural man be able to understand the phrases and sentences, and be able to discourse of them, yet he wanteth faith, and a spiritual sense and relish of them; they are folly to him. It noteth the utter contempt of spiritual things by a carnal heart, who looketh upon redemption by Christ crucified, with the consequent benefits, as things frivolous and vain. Paul at Athens was accounted 'a babbler,' Acts 17:18. The same disposition is still in natural men; for though these truths, by the prescription and consent of many ages, have now obtained veneration and credit, yet carefully to observe them, to live to the tenor of them, whatever hazards and inconveniences we are exposed to in the world, is still counted foolish. Mark, for greater emphasis, it is μωρία, folly, as carnal wisdom is ἔχθρα, 'enmity against God,' Rom. 8:7. 'Neither can he know them.' It is out of sloth and opposition and moral impotency; as it is said, Rom. 8:7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be.' Reason is a short and defective light, not only actually ignorant, but unable to conceive of them. It is not only through negligence he doth not, but through weakness he cannot. Take mere nature in itself, and, like plants neglected, it soon runs wild; as the nations barbarous and not polished with arts and civility have more of the beast than the man in them: Jude 10, 'But what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.' suppose they use the spectacles of art, and the natural light of reason be helped by industry and learning, yet how erroneous in things of religion: Rom. 1:21, 'When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither

were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened,' &c. The most civil nations were 'most foolish in matters of worship; and many placed fevers, and human passions, and every paltry thing, among the gods. The Scythians worshipped thunder, the Persians the sun; the most stupid and blockish nations seemed most wise in the choice of their gods; others were given up to more gross superstitions. All the arts in the world could not fully repair the ruins of the fall. The heathens invented logic for polishing reason; grammar and rhetoric for language; for government, and as a help to human society, laws; for bodily necessities, physic; for mollifying and charming the passions, so far as concerned human conversation, ethics; for families and private societies, economics: but for the soul and religious concerns, how blind and foolish were they! Nay, go higher. Suppose, besides the spectacles of art, nature be furnished with the glass of the word; yet John 1:5, 'The light shined in darkness and the darkness, comprehended it not.' We see how great scholars are defective in the most useful and practical points. Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, was ignorant of regeneration, John 3:10. They always err in one point or another. And in these things of moment, if they get an opinion and a dogmatical faith, and have an exact model and frame of truth, yet as long as they are carnal and unregenerate, how much doth a plain godly Christian exceed them in lively affection and serious practice! And whilst they are disputing of the natures and offices of Christ, and the nature of justification and sanctification, others enjoy what they speak of, and have a greater relish and savour and power of these truths upon their hearts. For ever it was a truth, and ever will be, Rom. 8:5, 'They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.' Nature can go no farther than itself, than a fleshly inclination moveth it. They have not this transforming light, and that sense of religion which is prevalent over lusts and worldly interests.

The next reason is, because they must be 'spiritually discerned;' that is, to know them inwardly, thoroughly, and with some relish and savour; there must be a higher light, there must be a cognation and

proportion between the object and the faculty. Divine things must be seen by a divine light, and spiritual things by a spiritual light. Sense, which is the light of beasts, cannot trace the workings or flights of reason in her contemplations. We cannot see a soul or an angel by the light of a candle; so fleshly wisdom cannot judge of divine things. The object must be not only revealed, but we must have an answerable light; so that when you have done all, you must say, 'How can I understand without an interpreter?' Acts 8:31. And this interpreter must be the Spirit of God—*Ejus est interpretari, cujus est condere*. To discern, so as to make aright judgment and estimate of things, dependeth upon God's help.

4. When this blindness is in part cured, yet still we need that God should open our eyes to the very last. We know nothing as we ought to know. David, a regenerate man, and well instructed, prayeth to have his eyes opened; for we need more light every day: Luke 24:45, 'Then opened he their understandings, that they might understand the scriptures.' Christ first opened the scriptures, then he opened their understandings.

Use 1. To show us the reason why the word prevaieth so little when it is preached with power and evidence; their eyes are not opened: Isa. 53:1, 'Who hath believed our report; and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? 'No teaching will prevail till we are taught of God.

Use 2. What need we have to consult with God, whenever we make use of the word, in reading, hearing, study. In reading, when thou openest the Bible to read, say, 'Lord, open mine eyes.' When thou hearest, beg a sight of the truth, and how to apply it for thy comfort. *Hæc audiunt quasi somniantes*, Luther saith of the most—in seeing they see not, in hearing they hear not. There was a fountain by Hagar, but she could not see it: Gen. 21:19, 'God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad to drink.' So for study; it is dangerous to set upon the study of divine things in the strength of wit and human helps. Men go forth in the strength of their own parts, or lean upon

the judgment of writers, and so are left in darkness and confusion. We would sooner come to the decision of a truth if we would go to God, and desire him to rend the veil of prejudices and interests.

Use 3. Is to press us to seek after this blessing, the opening of the eyes. Magnify the creating power of God: 2 Cor. 4:6, 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Make use of Christ: Col. 2:3, 'In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;' beg it earnestly of him. The apostle prayeth, Eph. 1:17, 18, 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling,' &c. Yea, mourn for it in cases of dubious anxiety. John wept when the book of the seven seals was not opened, Rev. 5:4. Mourn over your ignorance; refer all to practice: John 7:17, 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.' Wait for light in the use of means, with a simple, docile, sincere, humble mind: Ps. 25:9, 'The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.'

Doct. 2. Those whose eyes are opened by God, they see wondrous things in his word, more than ever they thought.

'Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.' Law is not taken strictly for the covenant of works, nor for the decalogue as a rule of life; but more generally for the whole word of God, which is full of wonders, or high and heavenly mysteries. In the decalogue or moral law there is wonderful purity, when we get a spiritual sense of it: Ps. 119:96, 'I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandments are exceeding broad;' and Ps. 19:7, 8, 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.' A wonderful equity: Rom. 7:12, 'The law is

holy, and the commandment is holy, just, and good.' A marvellous wisdom: Deut. 4:6, 'Keep therefore, and do them; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' In the whole word of God, the harmony and correspondence between all the parts, how the mystery grew from a dark revelation to clearer, is admirable. In the gospel, every article of faith is a mystery to be wondered at. The person of Christ: 1 Tim. 3:16, 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit,' &c. A virgin conceiveth, the Word is made flesh, the redemption and reconciliation of mankind, are the wonderful works of the Lord's grace. It is 'the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery,' 1 Cor. 2:7. 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory;' and it is called the 'mystery hidden from ages,' Eph. 3:9. The glory of heaven is admirable: Eph. 1:18, 'The riches of the glory of the inheritance of the saints in light.' That a clod of earth should be made an heir of heaven, deserves the highest wonder. All these are mysteries. So the wonderful effects of the word in convincing sinners: 1 Cor. 14:25, 'Thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face, he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.' Heb. 4:12: 'The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.' It is a searching and discovering word: John 4:29, 'See a man that hath told me all that ever I did.' In changing sinners: 1 Peter 2:9, 'That ye may show forth the praises of him that hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.' Peter's getting out of prison was nothing to it. In comforting, every grace is a mystery, to depend upon what we see not, to be as a rock in the midst of a storm. 'Dying, yet we live; as poor, yet making many rich,' 2 Cor. 6:9, 10. All the operations of the Spirit are wonderful: 1 Peter 1:8, 'Joy unspeakable and full of glory;' Phil. 4:7, 'Peace that passeth all understanding;' Rom. 8:26, 'Groans that cannot be uttered.'

And now, what divine illumination contributeth to the sight of these wonders?

1. It revealeth the truth of them, which otherwise is incomprehensible to the flesh: Mat. 16:17, 'Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.' Without this, no certain knowledge of Christ's person and office.

2. It more intimately acquainteth us with them: Mat. 13:11, 'To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; to others it is not given.' All God's works are full of wonder, yet blind men cannot see them, though the sun shineth never so clearly. A beautiful room into which there is but a crevice, when we lay our eye close to it, we see it.

Use 1. From hence we may learn, that it is one degree of profit to see so much in the word of God as to admire it; either at the mysteries of godliness or ungodliness, which the word discovereth, ὧ βῆθος. They that are most enlightened have most cause to wonder; for then they find truths which exceed all common reason, such as do not come into the minds of others, or, if they do, they seem incredible.

Use 2 is to encourage us to study the word; the wonders of God's works are many, but the wonders of his word greater. Quot articuli, tot miracula, the Papists say of Aquinas's Sums; but more truly may it be said of the word of God; all the doctrines of the word are a continued mystery. After man was fallen, it came not into the head of any creature how to satisfy justice, to make up the breach. Oh, the folly of them that despise the word, as curious wits and world lings do, as if it were a mean knowledge in comparison of what may be acquired from Aristotle and Plato or the politicians of the world! If there be in it some rudiments, something common with other writings, yet there are greater things than these: 'The deep things of God,' 1 Cor. 2:11; never such a revelation made to the world. And worldly men, that despise this study of the word, they despise that which angels wonder at, Eph. 3:10, and 'desire to pry into,' 1 Peter

1:12, and make great matters of trifles. The Sun of righteousness, is not he worth the beholding?

Use 3. Let us cease wondering at worldly things, great places, honours, heaps of wealth, fair buildings, as the disciples, Mark 13:1, 'Master, see what manner of stones and buildings are here!' It is said of Christ, Col. 2:9, 'In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily!' Fulness of the Godhead! oh, wonderful! The people wondered at that mass of money provided by David to build God a house, 1 Chron. 29:7, 8. Oh! but the unsearchable riches of grace, the rare plot of man's redemption, μέγα μυστήριον, how wonderful! All in and about Christ is rare. His name is Wonderful. All the promises of God are τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, 'exceeding great and precious promises,' 2 Peter 1:4; they transcend man's capacity. It condemneth the stupidity of them that are nothing moved or taken with things so great and wonderful—great in themselves, and should be precious to us.

Sermon V:

Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. - Genesis 24:63

I. WHAT MEDITATION IS. Before I can define it I must distinguish it.

1. There is that which we call occasional meditation, which is an act by which the soul spiritualiseth every object about which it is conversant. A gracious heart is like an alembic, it can distil useful meditations out of all things it meeteth with. Look, as it seeth all things in God, so it seeth God in all things. So small a matter as a grain of mustard-seed may yield many spiritual applications.

2. There is set and solemn meditation. Now this is of several sorts, or rather, they are but several parts of the same exercise.

(1) There is a reflexive meditation, by which we wholly fall upon ourselves. This is nothing else but a solemn parley between a man and his own heart (Psalm 4:4).

(2) There is a meditation, which is more direct, and that is of two sorts —

(a) Dogmatical, whose object is the Word.

(b) Practical, whose object is our own lives. These are the kinds of meditation. The definition may be formed thus: Meditation is that duty or exercise of religion whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn contemplation of spiritual things, for practical uses and purposes. I shall open the description by the parts of it.

1. It is a duty and exercise of religion.

(1) That it is a duty and exercise of religion appeareth by the evidence of Scripture, where it is commanded (Joshua 1:8), "This Book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night." It is made a character of a godly man (Psalm 1:2), "His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night." It is commended in the practice and example of the saints that were most famous in Scripture; Isaac in the text, Moses and David. And as it is plain by the evidence of Scripture; so by the light of nature and reason. God that is a Spirit deserveth the most pure and spiritual worship, as well as such as is

performed by the body. The thoughts are the eldest and noblest offspring of the soul, and the solemn consecration of them is fit for God.

(2) It is not a duty of an arbitrary concernment. It is not only a moral help that may be observed or omitted, but a necessary duty, without which all graces would languish and wither. Faith is lean and ready to starve unless it be fed with continual meditation on the promises; as David saith (Psalm 119:92), "Unless Thy law had been my delight, I should then have perished in my affliction." Thoughts are the caterers of the soul, that purvey for faith, and fetch in food and refresh it with the comfort of the promises. Hope is low, and doth not arise to such a fulness of expectation till by meditation we take a deliberate view of our hopes and privileges (Genesis 13:17).

II. THE NECESSITY AND PROFIT OF MEDITATION, OR MOTIVES TO PRESS TO THIS DUTY. I shall urge such as will serve also for marks; for when it is well performed, you will find these effects wrought in you. Meditation is the mother and nurse of knowledge and godliness, the great instrument in all the offices of grace; it helpeth on the work of grace upon the understanding, affections, and life, for the understanding of the doctrine of godliness, for the provoking of godly affections, and for the heavenly life.

1. In point of understanding it is of great advantage to us in the entertainment of the doctrines of religion.

(1) To give us a clearer and more distinct sight of them.

(2) That we may the better retain them.

(3) That they may be always more ready and present with us.

2. It is a great advantage to the work of grace upon the affections.

3. It is an advantage to the fruits of grace in the life; it maketh the heavenly life more easy, more sweet, more orderly and prudent.

III. RULES TO GUIDE YOU IN THIS WEIGHTY AFFAIR OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

1. Whatever you meditate upon must be drawn down to application.
2. Do not pry further than God hath revealed; your thoughts must be still bounded by the Word.
3. When you meditate of God you must do it with great care and reverence; His perfections are matter rather of admiration than inquiry.
4. In meditating on common things, keep in mind a spiritual purpose. God hath endowed man with a faculty to discourse, and employ his mind on earthly objects to spiritual purposes (Ecclesiastes 3:11).
5. Take heed of creating a snare to your souls. Some sins are catching, like fire in straw, and we cannot think of them without infection and temptation; the very thoughts may beget a sudden delight and tickling, which may pass through us like lightening, and set us all on fire (Ezekiel 23:19).
6. Meditate of those things especially which you have most need of. There is the greatest obligation upon the heart. The matter is not arbitrary; there you will find most help, and there the benefit will be most sensible.
7. Whatever you meditate upon, take heed of slightness. Transient thoughts leave no impression. See that you meditate but of one thing at once.
8. Come not off from holy thoughts till you find profit by them, either sweet tastes and relishes of the love of God, or high affections kindled towards God, or strong resolutions begotten in yourselves.

9. Be thankful to God when He blesseth you in meditation, or else you will find difficulty in the next.

10. Do not bridle up the free spirit by the rules of method. That which God calleth for is religion, not logic.

11. Your success in the duty is not to be measured by the multitude and subtlety of the thoughts, but the sincerity of them.

12. You must begin and end all with prayer. Duties are subservient one to another. In the beginning you must pray for a blessing on the duty,, and in the end commend your souls and resolutions to God. There is no hope in your own promises, but God's.

IV. THE LETS OR HINDRANCES OF MEDITATION, TOGETHER WITH THE HELPS AND MEANS THAT MAY QUICKEN YOU TO THE PERFORMANCE OF IT. The lets may be sooner discovered than remedied. The lets and hindrances are of several sorts, some common to this with other duties, and others more peculiar to the duty of meditation.

1. I begin with the first sort, such hindrances as are common to other duties, and they are four — sloth, love of pleasure, a guilty conscience, and an unwieldy mind. How shall we do to shake off this spiritual sloth? I answer —

(1) You must consider that a lazy spirit is most unfit for Christianity. The whole Christian life is carried on with much labour and diligence.

(2) It is better to take pains than to suffer pains, and to be found with the cords of duty than with the chains of darkness.

(3) There is nothing so hard in God's service but He hath manifested love enough to sweeten it.

(4) There is no difficulty in religion wholly insuperable and too hard for an active and industrious spirit. Those that follow on after God do at length find Him to their comfort.

(5) A lazy, backward heart must be urged forward with the greater importunity.

2. Another let and hindrance is love of pleasures. Men that would pass their time in mirth are unwilling to be so solemn and serious. When children's minds are set to play, it is irksome to hear of school or of their books; so when the heart is set for pleasure, it is a hard matter to bring the soul to religious performances. How shall we do to wean the soul from pleasures?

(1) Consider to love pleasure is to gratify the beast in us rather than the angel.

(2) Consider the sweetness of religious exercises is far better than that of carnal pleasures, as that heat is more manly that is gotten by exercise than by hovering over the fire.

3. The next general hindrance is a guilty conscience. What shall we do to remedy this?

(1) Get your conscience cleansed by the hearty application of the blood of Christ.

(2) There are matters comfortable that may be of excellent relief to the spirit (Hebrews 6:18; Psalm 94:19).

4. Another let and hindrance is unwieldiness of spirit to spiritual and heavenly duties. Thus our Saviour bids His disciples have a care e!! (Luke 21:34). What shall we do to help this?

(1) Learn a holy moderation and sobriety in outward businesses and pleasures. As the apostle says of prayer (Ephesians 6:18), "Watching thereunto"; the same rule holds good in meditation.

(2) Keep the body in a fit frame, that it may not be a clog to the soul, but a dexterous instrument. There is a sanctification of the body (1 Thessalonians 5:23). There are hindrances that are peculiar to the duty of meditation. I shall name but two — barrenness of thoughts and inconstancy.

1. Leanness and barrenness of thoughts. Now to remedy this —

(1) You must not give way to it, but try and use constant exercise. The more we work, the more vigorous and free is the soul for the work of God.

(2) Get a good stock of sanctified knowledge. Let there be a treasure in your hearts (Matthew 13:52).

(3) When the heart is barren, think of your own sins and corruptions, and the experiences of God to your own souls.

(4) You may season and affect your mind before meditation with some part of God's Word. Reading is a good preparative, and when we have taken in food, we may exercise our depastion and digestion upon it.

2. A loose garish spirit, that is apt to skip and wander from thought to thought. There is a madness in man; his thoughts are light and feathery, tossed to and fro, and like the loose wards in a lock, only kept up whilst we are turning the key. This doth much discourage Christians, that they cannot keep up their affections and command their thoughts. How shall we help and remedy this?

(1) When you go to meditate, you should exercise a command and restraint upon yourselves. This is expressed in Scripture by trussing up the loins of your minds (Luke 12:30).

(2) Pray and call in the help of God's Holy Spirit (Psalm 86:11), "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Lord, make my heart one. He that could stay the sun can stay the fleeting of your thoughts.

(3) Dry up these swimming toys and fancies with the flame of heavenly love. Love unites the heart, and where we have a pleasure, there we can stay (Psalm 119:97).

(4) Let the course of your lives be grave and serious. The mind is according to the course of the life.

(5) Watch against the first diversion; how plausible soever it be, look upon it as an intruding that breaks the rank.

(6) When you come to meditate in God's presence, do not bring the world with you; purge yourselves of all carnal affections (Ezekiel 33:31), "Their heart goeth after their covetousness." Always consider this: the prevailing lust will engross the thoughts.

MONERGISM BOOKS

The Duty of Meditation, by Thomas Manton, Copyright © 2021

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions August 2021. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068

