

external evils. Let this trouble for sin comfort thee when the presence of sin grieves thee.

2. *God accepts, through Jesus Christ, what you do sincerely, though you can do nothing purely and perfectly,* Cant. v. 1. Your sincerity is your evangelical perfection; the evil that is present is not imputed; the good that is present is (notwithstanding that com-mixed evil) accepted, which is stong consolation.

3. *You find your case was the case of blessed Paul, a man of eminent sanctity.* And if you consult all the saints, one by one, you will find them all sick of this disease; so that your case is not singular.

4. *Your justification is perfect, and without spot, though your sanctification be not so:* and the time is coming, when your sanctification shall be as your justification is, and after that no more complaints.



THE FOURTH

MEDITATION,

UPON EPH. i. 13.

In whom also, ye believed, that after ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise.

FROM his doxology and solemn thanksgiving, ver. 3. the apostle enumerates the principal Christian privileges that gave the occasion of that thanksgiving, among which this in the text is not the least, though last named.

In this one verse we have the two noble acts of faith displayed; Its direct act, called trusting; and its reflex act, which in order of nature and time follows it, and is implied in the word sealing.

In the latter clause (to which I shall confine my meditations) four things must be remarked; viz. 1. The subject; 2. Nature; 3. Author; And 4. Quality of assurance.

1. The subject of assurance, which is, and can be no other than a soul that hath closed with Christ by faith: Reflex acts necessarily pre-suppose direct ones. Never was any unbeliever sealed, except to damnation: Assurance is peculiarly the prerogative of believers.

2. The nature of assurance: He calls it sealing; an apt metaphor to express the nature of it; for assurance, like a seal, both confirms, declares, and distinguishes it; it confirms the grant of God, declares

the purpose of God, and distinguishes the person so privileged from other men.

3. The Author of assurance, which is the Spirit, he is the keeper of the great seal of heaven; and it is his office to confirm and seal the believer's right and interest in Christ and heaven, Rom. viii. 16.

4. Lastly, The quality of this Spirit of assurance, or the sealing Spirit: He seals in the quality of an holy Spirit, and of the Spirit of promise; as an holy Spirit, relating to his previous sanctifying work upon the sealed soul; as the Spirit of promise, respecting the *medium* or instrument made use of by him in his sealing work; for he seals by opening and applying the promises to believers from the Spirit's order. The note will be this:

Doct. *That the privilege of sealing follows the duty of believing.*

There is no season more proper to treat of the sealing of the Spirit, than at a sealing ordinance: Nor can I handle the Spirit's sealing-work in a more profitable method, than in satisfying these five queries particularly, and then applying the whole.

1. What is the Spirit's sealing-work, and how performed?
2. Why none are sealed till they believe?
3. Whether all believers are sealed?
4. What is the privilege of being sealed?
5. What are the effects of the Spirit's sealing?

1. *Query.* What is the Spirit's sealing-work? and how is it performed?

Ans. The sealing of the Spirit is, his giving a sure and certain testimony to the reality of that work of grace he hath wrought in our souls, and to our interest in Christ and the promises, thereby satisfying our fears and doubts about our estate and condition.

Every matter of weight and concernment is to be proved by two sufficient witnesses, Deut. xix. 15. Our sincerity and interest in Christ are matters of the deepest concernment to us in all the world, and therefore need a farther witness to confirm and clear them than that of our own Spirits, Rom. viii. 16. Three things concur to the Spirit's sealing work.

He sanctifies the soul; he irradiates and clears that work of sanctification; he enables it thereby to apply promises.

The first is his material or objective seal; the latter his formal sealing. None but the Spirit of God can clear and confirm our title to Christ, for he only searcheth the deep things of God, 1 Cor. ii. 10. and it is his office, Rom. viii. 16. *συμμαρτυρεῖν*, to witness with our spirits.

The seal or witness of the Spirit must needs be true and certain, because omniscience and truth are his essential properties. He is omniscient, 1 Cor. ii. 10. and therefore cannot be deceived himself. He is the Spirit of truth, John xiv. 17. and therefore cannot deceive us;

so that his testimony is more infallible and satisfactory than a voice from heaven, 2 Pet. i. 19.

If an angel should appear, and tell us, Christ hath said to him, Go and tell such a man, that I love him, that I shed my blood for him, and will save him, it could never give that repose and satisfaction to the mind, as the internal witness or seal of the Spirit doth; for that may be a delusion, but this cannot. The witness of our own heart may amount to a strong probability, but the witness of the Spirit is demonstration, 1 John iv. 24.

So, that as it is the design and work of Satan to cast in doubts and fears into gracious hearts, to perplex and entangle them, so, oppositely, it is the work of the Spirit to clear and settle the sanctified soul, and fill it with peace and joy in believing, John xvi. 7. Rom. xiv. 7.

In sealing, he both attests the *fidem quæ creditur*, the doctrine or object of faith, and the *fidem qua creditur*, the infused habit or grace of faith; of the former he saith, This is my word; of the latter, This is my work: and his seal or testimony is ever more agreeable to the written word, Isa. viii. 20. So that what he speaks in our hearts, and what he saith in the scripture, are evermore concordant and harmonious testimonies.

To conclude: In sealing the believer he doth not make use of an audible voice, nor the ministry of angels, nor immediate and extraordinary revelations, but he makes use of his own graces implanted in our hearts, and his own promises written in the scriptures; and in this method he usually brings the doubting trembling heart of a believer to rest and comfort.

2. *Query.* Why are none sealed till after believing?

Answer. It cannot be denied, but that many persons in a state of nature and unbelief, may have ungrounded confidences, and false comforts built thereupon. This is evident from Matth. vii. 22. 'Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?' And John viii. 54, 55. 'Of whom ye say that he is your God, and yet ye have not known him.' And, beyond all, is that startling scripture, Heb. iv. 4, 5. "Who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they fall away," &c.

But for any, except real believers, to have those witnesses and sealings of the Spirit described above, is utterly impossible, and will evidently appear to be so, whether we consider the author, nature, object, mediums, end and design of this work.

First, Consider the author of this work, the *Spirit of God*, who is an holy Spirit, as the text calls him, and the *Spirit of truth*, as Christ calls him, John xiv. 17. and it cannot be that ever he should give testimony to a lie, or give a false witness, quite cross to the very tenour of the written word, as he must do, should he seal an unbe-

liever. What though they be elect? yet, whilst unregenerate, they have no actual interest in Christ and the promises, and therefore can have none sealed by the Spirit. *Prius est prædicare de esse quam de cognosci*: we must be saints before we can be known to be so.

Secondly, Consider but the nature of this work, and it cannot be that ever an unbeliever should be sealed by the Spirit; for assurance is produced in our souls by the reflexive acts of our faith: the Spirit helps us to reflect upon what hath been done by him formerly upon our hearts; 'hereby we know that we know him,' 1 John ii. 3. To know that we know, is a reflex act; now it is impossible there should be a reflex before there hath been a direct act: no man can have the evidence of his faith, before the habit be infused, and the vital act first performed.

Thirdly, Consider the object-matter, to which he seals, and it will be found to be his own sanctifying operations upon our hearts, and consequently to our privileges in Christ, Rom. viii. 16. 1 John iii. 24. The thing or matter attested is, that Christ abideth in us, and that we are the children of God; but no such thing can be sealed till we believe, for neither our adoption nor sanctification can be before faith.

Fourthly, Consider the mediums or instruments used by the Spirit in his sealing-work: the promises are his sealing instruments, and on that account he is called *the Spirit of promise* in the text; not only because he is the Spirit promised, but as the promises contain the Spirit, so the Spirit uses the promises (i. e.) clears them to our understandings, and helps us to apply them to our souls. But this he never doth, nor can do, till the soul, by faith, have union with Christ; for till then, it hath no right in the promises.

Fifthly, and lastly, Consider the end and design of this work of the Spirit, which is to secure to the soul its peace, pardon, and salvation in Christ, he seals believers to the day of redemption, Eph. iv. 30. (i. e.) to their complete salvation; so then it must be equally impossible for an unbeliever to be sealed as to be saved.

3. *Query*. The next inquiry is, Whether all believers are sealed by the Spirit?

Answe. The resolution of this query will depend upon several distinctions that must be made upon this matter.

Distinction 1. We must distinguish the different kinds of the Spirit's sealing; all his sealing-work is not of one kind nor to one and the same use and end.

There is an objective seal, which distinguishes the person; and a formal seal, which clears and ratifies his interest in Christ and salvation; the first he doth in sanctifying us, the second in assuring us.

When he seals objectively, that is, when he sanctifies us really by the infusion of grace, he seals us by way of distinction from other men, which is one end of sealing; for though, in respect of God's decree and purpose, there was a difference betwixt us and others be-

fore time, 2 Tim. ii. 19. and although in regard of Christ's intention in his death, there was a difference betwixt us and others, John xvii. 9. yet all this while there is no personal actual difference betwixt us and others, till sanctification do make one, Eph. ii. 3. and 1 Cor. vi. 11. But the sanctification of the Spirit makes a real difference in the state and temper of the person, 2 Cor. v. 17. and manifests that difference which election put betwixt us and others before time, 1 Thess. i. 4, 5. And yet all this while a man may not be formally sealed, i. e. his sanctification may be very doubtful to himself, and he may labour under great fears about it.

Distinction 2. The seasons of the Spirit's sealing must be distinguished; and these are to some,

1st, Immediately upon the soul's first closing with Christ at conversion, especially when conversion is wrought at a riper age, and is ushered in by a greater degree of the spirit of bondage, and deep inward terrors. Thus the Prodigal (the emblem of a convert so brought home to God) was entertained with the fatted calf and music, but all find not this presently, as some do.

2dly, Times of eminent communion with God are sealing times. There are extraordinary out-lets of peace, joy, and comfort, at some seasons, in duty, which makes the state of the soul very clear, and banishes all scruples and fears from the heart.

3dly, Others are sealed upon some imminent hazard they have been exposed to for Christ, or some extraordinary sufferings they have undergone for Christ, wherein they have carried it with eminent meekness, patience, and self-denial, 2 Cor. i. 4, 5. Thus the martyrs were many times sealed in the depth of their sufferings.

4thly, It is usually found that a sealing-time follows a dark day of desertion, and sore combats of temptations; *post nubila phœbus*. So that text, Rev. ii. 17. is expounded by some, 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written.'

5thly, Dying-times prove sealing-times to many souls, if their whole life hath been like that day described by the prophet, Zech. xiv. 17. Neither dark nor light, a life betwixt hopes and fears, yet at evening-time it hath been light.

Distinction 3. Lastly, We must distinguish these several ways and manners of sealing: Some are extraordinary and immediate, vouchsafed only to some persons, at some special times and seasons. Thus Zaccheus was in an extraordinary and immediate way ascertained of his salvation; Luke xix. 9. 'This day is salvation come to this house.' And so the palsy-man; Mark ii. 5. 'Son, (saith Christ) thy sins be forgiven thee.' But these immediate ways are ceased; no man may now expect by any new revelation or sign from heaven, by any voice or extraordinary inspiration, to have his salvation sealed, but must expect that mercy in God's ordinary way and method, searching the

scriptures, examining our own hearts, and waiting on the Lord in prayer.

The learned Gerson gives an instance of one that had been long upon the borders of despair, and at last sweetly assured and settled; and being asked how he attained that assurance, he answered, *non ex nova aliqua revelatione, &c.* Not by any new revelation, but by subjecting my understanding to, and comparing my heart with the written word.

And Mr. Roberts, in his treatise of the covenants, speaks of another that so vehemently panted after the sealings and assurance of the love of God to his soul, that for a long time he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; and sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees or stones there: This was denied him, but in time a better was afforded, in a scriptural way.

Now to resolve the query out of these distinctions.

First, Though all believers have not the formal sealings of the Spirit, yet they have the objective or material seal; that is, the Spirit is in them as a sanctifying Spirit, putting a real difference betwixt them and others, when he is not with them by way of evidence and assurance of sanctification.

Secondly, Though all believers are not sealed at one and the same time, yet there are few, if any believers, but do meet with one season or other in this life, wherein the Lord doth seal them; if not at their first close with Christ, as many have been sealed, yet in some choice and eminent season of communion with God: Such golden spots of time, such precious seasons most Christians can speak of; though as Bernard speaks, it be *rara hora, brevis mora*, seldom, but sweet: Or if not in the course of their active obedience, it is a thousand to one but they shall meet it in the way of their passive obedience, if God exercise them eminently under the cross, or after a dark cloud of desertion, or in a dying hour.

Thirdly, and *lastly,* though God now seals not men in an extraordinary and immediate way, by revelation, immediate inspiration, or voices from heaven, yet most Christians are sealed in the ordinary way of the Spirit, under one ordinance or other, in one duty or other.

4. Query. *What is the privilege of being sealed by the Spirit?*

Ans. Much every way; words cannot express the riches of this mercy: For let us but consider the four following particulars, and you will admire the mercy.

First, Consider whose act and proper work sealing is. God doth not send angels upon this errand; though, if he did, that would be a great honour to poor dust and ashes, but he sends his Spirit to do it. O the condescension of the great God to men! This is a greater honour than if millions of angels were employed about it.

And then, as to the certainty and satisfaction, it is beyond all other

ways and methods in the world ; for in miraculous voices and inspirations it is possible there may, *subesse falsum*, be found some cheats or impostures of the devil ; but the Spirit's witness in the heart, suitable to his revelation in the scripture, cannot deceive us.

Secondly, The conclusion or truth sealed is ravishing and transporting. All Christians vehemently pant for it, few have the enjoyment of it for any long continuance ; but whilst they do enjoy it, they enjoy heaven upon earth, a joy beyond all the joys of this world. To have this conclusion surely sealed, Christ is mine, my sin is pardoned, I shall be saved from wrath through him ; O what is this ! what is this !

Thirdly, Consider the subject or person sealed, a poor sinful wretch, that has, ten thousand times over grieved the good Spirit of God, by whom, notwithstanding, thou art sealed to the day of redemption : Thou hast by every sin deserved to be sealed up to damnation : Thou hast reason to account and esteem thyself much inferior in graces and duties to many thousands of the saints that are panting after this privilege, and cannot obtain it : O the riches of the goodness of God !

Fourthly, and lastly, Consider the designs and aims of the Spirit in his sealing thy soul, which are,

1. To secure heaven to thee for ever.

2. As intermediate thereunto, to bring very much of heaven into thy soul, in the way to it ; indeed to give thee two heavens, whilst many others must suffer two hells.

5. Query. *Lastly*, we will enquire, *What are the effects of the Spirit's sealing upon our souls, by which we may distinguish and clearly discern it from all delusions of Satan, and all impostures whatsoever.*

Ans. The genuine and proper effects and fruits of sealing are, 1. Inflamed love. 2. Renewed care. 3. Deep abasements. 4. Increase of strength. 5. A desire to be with the Lord. 6. Improved mortification to the world.

Wheresoever these are found consequent to our communion with God, and his manifestations of himself to us therein, they put it beyond all doubt that it was the seal of his own blessed Spirit, and no delusion.

1. The sealings of the Spirit cannot but inflame the love of the soul in a very intense degree towards God ; one flame doth no more naturally beget another, than the love of God doth kindle the love of a gracious soul to him : ' We have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' 1 John iv. 16, 19. When Christ had forgiven much to that poor woman that had sinned much, and manifested pardoning mercy to her soul ; O how much was her love to Christ inflamed thereby ! Luke vii. 47.

2. Renewed care and diligence follows the sealings of the Spirit : Now is the soul at the foot of Christ, as Mary was at the sepulchre, with fear and great joy. He that travels the road with a rich treasure about him, is afraid of a thief in every bush. This is exem-

plified in the spouse, who had endured many a sad day and night in Christ's absence, and sought him sorrowing: But when she had regained his felt and sensible presence, it is said, Cant. iii. 4. "I found him whom my soul loveth; I held him and would not let him go."

She doth not (as Mr. Durham speaks) lay by diligence, as if all were done; but is of-new taken up with as great care to retain and improve this mercy, as before she was solicitous to obtain it. Whether a believer want or have, whether he be seeking or enjoying, there is still matter of exercise for him in his condition.

3. Deep abasements and great humblings used to follow the eminent appearances of God to the souls of men. "Lord, (said that disciple) how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the world?" John xiv. 22. When God sealed the covenant to Abraham, to be a God to him, at this Abraham fell upon his face. Gen. xvii. 1, 2, 3. Never doth a soul lie lower in the dust, and abhor itself, than when the Lord makes the most signal manifestations of his grace and love to it.

4. Increased strength follows the sealings of the Spirit. New powers enter into the soul, and a sensible improvement of its abilities for duty: "Or ever I was aware (saith the spouse) my soul made me as the chariots of Amminadib," Cant vi. 12.

Now the wheels of the soul being oiled with the joy and comfort of the Spirit, run nimbly in the ways of obedience. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

5. Sealings of the Spirit inflame the desires of the soul after heaven, and make it long to go home. Nothing makes death so undesirable to the saints, as the doubts and fears that hang upon their spirits about their condition. Were their evidences for heaven clear, and their doubts resolved, they would, as the apostle speaks, "desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ," Phil. i. 23. If once the great question of our interest in Christ be thoroughly decided, and all be clear betwixt us and our God, we shall find life a matter of patience, and death the object of desire.

Siathly, and lastly, Improved mortification to the world, flows naturally from the sealings and assurances of the love of God to our souls. It is with our souls, after such a view of heaven, and a sealing interest therein, as it is with him that hath been gazing upon that glorious creature the sun, when he comes to cast his eyes again upon the earth, all things seem dark and cloudy to him; he sees no beauty in any of those things, because of that excellent lustre which he lately beheld. "We know (saith the apostle) that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." There is assurance or sealing. "For in this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:" There is the natural effect of it, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2.

Uses. The point speaks to three sorts of persons, viz. 1. To those that have not yet been sealed. 2. To those that once had, but now want this comfort. 3. To those that enjoy the comforts of it.

First, To those that yet want this mercy, who have not been formerly sealed by any assurance of their title to Christ, but all their days have been clogged with fears, and doubt of their condition. To such my counsel is,

I. That you be not quiet under these uncertainties, but pant after the assurance of peace and pardon. Say unto Christ, as the spouse did, Cant. viii. 6. "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm:" Pant after it, as David did, Psal. xxxv. 3. "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

How can you look upon such precious promises, and not dare to taste them? How can you hear others speak of their satisfaction, peace, and assurance, and be quiet until you have also attained it? What is it that hinders this mercy, that it cannot come home to your souls! Is it your neglect of duty? O stir up yourselves to take hold of God! Is it want of a thorough search and examination of your state? O let not thine eyes find rest, till that be fully done. Is it some special guilt upon thy soul, that grieves the Spirit of God? Be restless till it be removed. I know this mercy is not at your command, do what you can do; but yet I also know, when God bestows it, he usually doth it in these ways of our duty.

Secondly. To those that once had, but now want this blessing, who say as Job xxix. 2, 3. "O that it were with me as in days past!" The darkness is the greater to you, because you have walked in the light of the Lord. The sum of Christ's counsel in this case is given in three words, Rev. ii. 5. *Remember, repent, reform.*

First, Remember, i. e. Ponder, consider, compare time with time, and state with state, how well it once was, how sad it is now.

Secondly, Repent; mourn over these your sinful relapses; sure you may challenge the first place among all the mourners in the world. Your loss is great. O better to have lost the light of your eyes, than this light of God's countenance. Your sin hath separated betwixt you and your God. O mourn over it.

Thirdly, Reform; Do your first works again. O Christian, consider thy heart is sunk deeper into the world than it was wont to be; thy duties are fewer, and thy zeal and affection to God much abated. Return, return, O backsliding soul, and labour to recover thy first love to Christ whatever pains it cost thee.

Lastly, To those that do enjoy these choice and invaluable mercies, the sealings of the Spirit.

First, Take heed that you grieve not the good Spirit of God, "by whom ye are sealed to the day of redemption," Eph. iv. 30. He hath comforted you; do not you grieve him: The Spirit is a tender delicate thing, you may quickly deprive yourselves of his joy and peace

Secondly, Be humble under this advancement and dignity. If your hearts once begin to swell look out for humbling dispensations quickly, 2 Cor. xii. 7. This treasure is always kept in the vessel of a contrite and humble heart.

Thirdly, Keep close to duty; yea, tack one duty to another by intermediate ejaculations. If care of duty be once remitted, you are not far from a sad change of your condition.

Fourthly, Improve all ordinances, especially this great sealing ordinance, for your farther confirmation and establishment. Act your faith to the utmost of its ability, upon Christ crucified; and comfort will flow in: The more the direct acts of faith are exercised, the more powerful and sweet its reflex acts are like to be.



THE FIFTH

MEDITATION,

UPON JOHN i. 29.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world.

THE scope of this chapter, is to prove the divinity and eternal Godhead of Jesus Christ. One of those arguments by which this great article of faith is confirmed and proved is the testimony of John. This testimony of John is the more remarkable, because it was before prophesied of him, that when the Messiah should come, this messenger should go before his face, to prepare the way for him, Mal. iii. 1.

Now, among all the testimonies that ever John gave of Christ, none ever was, or could be more full and clear than this in the text: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!"

In which words are remarkable, 1. The *preface* to his testimony. 2. The testimony itself.

First, The preface or introduction to John's testimony; Behold! there is a double use in scripture of this word: sometimes it is used by way of indication, and sometimes by way of excitation. In the first, it points out the person; in the last, it raises our affections to him. In this place it hath both these uses.

Behold the Lamb of God! q. d. 'This is the great expectation and hope of all ages. This person whom you behold, is the *desire of all*