

*Non est disputandum de gustu.* For want of this, many professors turn aside from truth in the hour of trial. O brethren! labour to feel the influences of religion upon your very hearts and reins! this will settle you better than all the arguments in the world can do; by this, the ways of God are more endeared to men, than by any other way in the world. When your hearts have once felt it, you will never forsake it.

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THE THIRD

MEDITATION,

UPON ROM. vii. 21.

*I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

**T**HIS chapter is the very anatomy of a Christian's heart, and gives an account of the most secret frames, and inward workings of it, both as to graces and corruptions: and this verse is a compendium of both: for the words are a mournful complaint, uttered with a deep sense of an inward pressure, by reason of sin; wherein we are to consider three things:

1. The person complaining.
2. The matter of complaint.
3. The discovery of that matter.

*First*, The person complaining: I find, I Paul, though I come not behind the chiefest of all the apostles, though I have been wrapt into the third heaven, and heard things unutterable; yet I, for all that, find in me a law. Never was any mere man more deeply sanctified; never any lived at an higher rate of communion with God; never any did Christ more service in this world; and yet he found a law of sin in himself.

*Secondly*, The matter of the complaint, which consists in a double evil he groaned under; viz. 1. The presence of sin at all times. 2. The operation of sin, especially at some times.

*First*, The presence of sin at all times: *Evil* (saith he) *is present with me*, it follows me as my shadow doth. By evil we must understand no other evil but sin, the evil of evils; which, in respect of power and efficacy, he also calls a law; because as laws, by reason of their annexed rewards and punishments, have a mighty power and

efficacy upon the minds of men; so sin, indwelling sin, that root of all our trouble and sorrow, hath a mighty efficacy upon us.

And this is the mournful matter of his complaint: it is not for outward afflictions, though he had many; nor for what he suffered from the hands of men, though he suffered many grievous things: but it is sin, dwelling and working in him, that swallows up all other troubles, as rivers are lost in the sea; this evil was always with him, the constant residence of sin was in his heart and nature.

*Secondly*, And what further adds to his burthen, as it dwelt in him at all times, so it exerted its efficacy more especially at sometimes, and those the special times, and principal seasons in his whole life: when I would do good (saith he) any spiritual good, and among the rest, when I address myself to any spiritual duty, or heavenly employment; when I design to draw near to God, and promise myself comfort and redress in communion † with him, then is evil present. Oh! if I were but rid of it in those hours, what a mercy should I esteem it, though I were troubled with it at other times! Could I but enjoy my freedom from it in the seasons of duty, and times of communion with God, what a comfort would that be! But then is the special season of its operation: never is sin more active and busy, than at such a time; and this, O this is my misery and my burden!

*Thirdly*, The next thing to be heeded here, is the discovery of this evil to him, over which he so mourns and laments: I find then a law, saith he, I find it (i. e.) by inward sense, feeling, and sad experience. He knew there was such a thing as original sin in the nature of men, when he was an unregenerated Pharisee; but though he had then the notion of it, he had not the sense and feeling of it as now he had; he now feels what before he traditionally understood and talked of: I find a law, *q. d.* what or how others find, I know not: some may boast of their *gifts*, and some may talk more than becomes them of their graces; they may find excellencies in themselves; and admire themselves too much for them; but, for my part, 'I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present.' I am sure I find a bad heart in the best season, a proud, dead, wandering, hard heart: I find it woefully out of order, God knows, and this is my misery. Hence note,

*Doct. That the best Christians do sensibly feel and sadly bewail the workings of their corruptions, and that in the very seasons and opportunities of their communion with God.*

Bring thy thoughts, reader, close to this point, and sadly ponder these three things in it:

*First*, In what special acts Christians use to feel the working of their corruption in the season of their communion.

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† When I go about the best exercises of religion, I find within me the law of the flesh rising up, and drawing me from them. *Tolletus.*

*Secondly*, Why is it that corruption stirs and troubles them more at such a time than at others.

*Thirdly*, Upon what account this is so great a burden to every gracious heart.

*First*, As to the first of these, namely, the special actings of corruption in the seasons of communion, they are such as have a natural aptitude and design to destroy all communion betwixt God and the soul; Gal. v. 17. ‘The flesh lusteth against the Spirit.’ It is contrary to the Spirit; and by reason of that contrariety, a poor Christian cannot do the things that he would.

How many times have some Christians lamented this upon their knees, with bleeding hearts and weeping eyes? Lord, I came hither to enjoy thee; I hoped for some light, strength, and refreshment in this duty: I promised myself a good hour; my heart began to warm and melt in duty; I was nigh to the expectation and desire of my soul; but the unbelief, deadness, and vanity of my heart hath separated betwixt me and my God, and with-held good things from me.

Three things are requisite to communion with God in duties:

*First*, Composedness of thoughts.

*Secondly*, Activity of faith.

*Thirdly*, Excitations of affections: and all these are sensibly obstructed by innate corruption; for by in-dwelling sin.

*First*, The order of the soul is disturbed by sending forth multitudes of vain and impertinent thoughts, to infest and distract the soul in its approaches to God: the sense of this evil gave occasion to that prayer, Psal. lxxxvi. 11. ‘Unite my heart to fear thy name.’ How much have we to do with our own hearts upon this account every day? Abundance of rules are given to cure this evil, but the corruption of the heart makes them all necessary.

*Secondly*, The activity of faith is clogged by natural unbelief: O what difficulties is every work of faith carried through! ‘Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief,’ Mark ix. 24. It cramps the hand of faith in every part of its work; the soul sensibly feels itself bound and fettered by its own unbelief, so that it cannot assent with that fulness, clearness, and determinateness that it would; it cannot apply with that strength, certainty, and comfort it desires; and thus are the wings of faith pinioned, that when we should soar aloft in the highest acts of sweet communion with God, we can but flutter upon the earth, and make some weak essays and offers heavenward, which oftentimes are frustrated and put by, through the unbelief that is in us.

*Thirdly*, The excitation of the affections is rendered difficult, by reason of that natural deadness and hardness that is in the heart. Alas! it is naturally an heart of stone, and as easy it is to dissolve or melt the rocks into a sweet syrup, as the heart into spiritual and heavenly affections towards God. There is scarce any one thing in the world that Christians more passionately bewail, and are more sensibly afflicted for, than the deadness and hardness of their own hearts.

Nothing is found sufficient sometimes to affect and raise them; and yet if they be not excited out of their torpor and stupidity, they cannot have communion with God in duties.

*Secondly*, And if we enquire into the reasons why poor Christians find themselves more infested by natural corruptions in the seasons of duty than at other times; the reasons are obvious to him that considers, 1. That duty irritates it; 2. Satan excites it; 3. God permits it to be so.

*First*, Corruption is irritated by duty, it is provoked by that which bridles and purges it: Nothing is found more destructive to sin than communion with God is; and therefore nothing makes a fiercer opposition to all fellowship and communion betwixt the soul and its God than sin doth. As waters swell and rage when they are obstructed by a dam, so do our corruptions when obstructed and checked by duty. Sin would fain make men leave praying, and prayer would fain make men leave sinning.

*Secondly*, As duty irritates it, so Satan excites it, especially in such seasons. When Joshua the high-priest stood before the Lord, Satan was seen standing at his right-hand to resist him, Zech. iii. 1. How hard is it for a Christian then to be dexterous, apt, and ready for spiritual work, whilst Satan stands at his right hand, the working hand, to make resistance.

The devil is aware that one hour of close, spiritual, and hearty converse with God in prayer, is able to pull down what he hath been contriving and building many a year. Now this envious spirit having an easy access to the fancy, that busy and unruly power of the soul, will not be wanting to create such figments and notions in it, as, like a rapid stream, shall carry away the soul and all its thoughts from God in duty. O what ado have most Christians to prevent the sallies and excursions of their hearts from God at such times!

3. As Satan exercises it, so the wise and holy God, for good ends to his people, permits it to be so.

This thorn in the flesh keeps them humble; these lamented distractions and corruptions in their duties destroy their dependence upon them, and glorying in them: For if we be so prone to pride and confidence in our duties, amidst such sensible workings and minglings of corruption with them, what would we be if they were more pure and excellent? These things also make the saints weary of this world, and to groan within themselves after the more perfect state wherein God shall be enjoyed and seen in more perfection and satisfaction. But,

*Thirdly*, This in the mean time cannot but be a very grievous affliction and pressure to the gracious soul, to be thus clogged and infested by its own corruptions in the very season of its communion with God. For,

*First*, By this the soul is rendered very unsuitable to that holy presence it approaches; Hab. i. 13. 'Thou art of purer eyes than to

behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity.' Must the great and blessed God wait upon a poor worm till it be at leisure to attend him? Must he be forsaken for every trifle that comes in the way of its fancy? Oh, how provoking an evil is this! 'Surely God heareth not vanity, neither will the Almighty regard it,' Job xxxv. 13. 'This unsuitableness of our spirits to the Lord, cannot do less than cover our faces with shame; as did Ezra, chap. ix. 6. 'O my God, I am ashamed, and even blush to look up unto thee.'

*Secondly*, By this those benefits and comforts are intercepted which are better than life; there is a sensible presence of God; there are manifestations of pardon, peace and love; there are reviving influences and fresh anointings of the Spirit; there are a thousand mercies of this kind, that in their seasons are communicated to men in the way of duty; and would it not grieve a man to the very heart and soul, to be defeated of those inestimable treasures, by the breaking forth of the unbelief, pride, or vanity of his own heart, when such mercies are almost in his hand? 'Your iniquities, (saith the prophet) have separated betwixt you and your God; and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear,' Isa. lix. 2. O cruel covering! O dismal cloud! that hides the face of God from his people, that they cannot behold it! "Wherefore am I come from Geshur (saith Absalom) if I may not see the king's face?"

What do I here upon my knees, saith a Christian, if I may not see God? Duties are nothing to me without God; the world and all its comforts are dry and tasteless things to me without God; his manifested favour and sealed love are the very life of my life, and from this the corruptions of my own heart have cut me off.

*Thirdly*, By these things the beauty and excellency of duties are defaced. These dead flies spoil that excellent ointment; for wherein consists the beauty and true excellency of duties, but in that spirituality and heavenly temper of soul with which they are performed? This makes them suitable to their object, John iv. 24. Take away spirituality from duties, and then you may number them among your sins, and the matters of your shame and sorrow. Take away the heart from duty, and what remains but a dead carcase without life or beauty?

*Fourthly*, By these things gracious souls are greatly puzzled and perplexed about their state and condition; this is the fountain of their fears and doubtings. Oh! when a man feels such deadness in his heart towards God, such stiffness in his will to the will of God, such a listless, careless temper to all that is spiritual, how (thinks he) can this consist with a renewed state and temper? Sure no Christian is troubled with such an heart as mine is, especially when it shall be found in its ordinary course, so free, nimble and indefatigable in its pursuits and entertainments of things sensual and earthly: there it is as the chariots of Amminadib, but here, like Pharaoh's chariots: there it as much needs the curb, as it doth the spur here. *Lord*, saith the

poor soul, *I know not what to do : if I do not look into my heart, I cannot be sincere ; and if I do, I can have no comfort.* This is a sad perplexity indeed !

*Fifthly*, and lastly, By these things the Spirit of God is grieved ; and that which grieves him cannot but be a grief and burden to us : his motions are quenched by these corruptions, his sanctifying designs (as much as lies in us) obstructed by them ; surely then there is cause enough why a Christian should follow every vain thought with a deep sigh, and every stirring of unbelief with a sad tear.

The usefulness of this point is great and exceeding seasonable, when we are to draw nigh to God, and address ourselves to spiritual duties ; it may to great purpose be improved by way,

1. Of information.
2. Direction.
3. Consolation.

We may greatly improve it for our information, in the following particulars.

1. Hence we may take our measures of the wonderful and astonishing grace and condescension of God to his people, who, notwithstanding all that evil which is at present with them in the good they do, will not reject their persons or duties for all that.

How doth free grace make its own way through swarms of vanity ! How doth it break through all the deadness, infidelity, and hardness of our hearts to do us good ? Though evil be present with us, our gracious God will not be absent from us notwithstanding that.

How greatly was the spouse amazed at the unexpected condescension and grace of Christ in this matter ? Cant. ii. 8. 'It is the voice of my beloved ; behold, he cometh leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills.' *It is the voice of my beloved.* That abrupt broken expression shews a perfect surprize : she saw mountains of guilt and unworthiness betwixt Christ and her soul ; and yet, behold, he comes skipping over all those mountains and hills : O free grace, rich and admirable grace, which with so many notwithstandings and neverthelesses, will save and comfort the poor and unworthy soul !

2. How little reason have any of us to be proud of our best performances, 'There is not a just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not,' saith Solomon, Eccl. vii. 20. If there be something supernaturally good in our duties, yet there is abundance of natural evil commixed with that good ; the evil is wholly ours, the good wholly God's : we have no reason then to glory in our best performances.

It hath been a question with some, Whether some short transient act of a regenerate soul may not be free from sin ; but it was never questioned, whether any continual act, much less a course of actions, could be without sin. Evil will be present with us in all we do ; it will be with us in our closets ; present even in the awful presence of the holy God, in the most high and solemn duties of religion, in the

most pure and spiritual actions that pass from us: cease then, as from dependence, so from pride and conceitedness in all you do. Whilst our natures are sanctified but in part, and our principles mixt, our duties and performances can never be pure. ‘Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one,’ John xiv. 4.

3. How are we all obliged to bless God for Jesus the Mediator, to make us and our sinful duties acceptable to God? Sad were our case if this high priest did not “bear the iniquity of our holy things,” as it is, Exod. xxviii. 38. It is his oblation and intercession that obtains and continues our pardon for our prayer-sins, our hearing-sins, our sacrament-sins; these alone would eternally damn us, if we had no other, did not free grace make us accepted in the Beloved,” Eph. i. 6. When evil is present with us, then is Christ, our Advocate, present with the Father for us; and thence it is that we are not destroyed upon our knees, and that the jealousy of God breaks not forth as fire, to devour us in our very duties.

4. If evil be present with us, yea, inherent in us, in our best duties, what need had Christians then to watch against the external occasions of sin, and to keep a close guard upon their senses, especially when they have to do with God?

There is danger enough from within; you need not open another door from without. This natural corruption is too active in itself, if there be no irritation by any external occasion; how much more when the eye and ear opened and unguarded, and occasions are offered it from without. Watching is half the work of a Christian whilst he is praying, Eph. vi. 18. The Arabian proverb is as instructive as it is mystical, *Shut the windows, that the house may be light.*

5. If evil be present when we would do good, if it infest us in our best duties, then certainly there is no rest to be expected for any of God’s people in this world. Where shall we go to be free from sin? If any where, let us go to our closets, to our knees, to the ordinances of God; yea, but even there evil is, and will be present with us; if we cannot be free from evil there, it is vain to expect it elsewhere in this world. Only in heaven believers rest from sin. When once they are absent from the body, and present with the Lord, sin shall no more be present with them; which should make all that hate sin, long for heaven, and be “willing to be dissolved and be with Christ.”

2. For *direction*. Let all that experimentally see and feel what the apostle here mourns over, carefully attend such directions as may prevent the spoil of their duties by the working of their corruptions in them.

Though no rules are found sufficient to prevent wholly the influence of our corruptions upon duties, yet own it as a special mercy, if it may in any measure be prevented or restrained: In order whereunto I shall hint briefly these following rules, which the experience of

many Christians hath recommended, as exceedingly useful in this case.

Rule 1. *Be more diligent in preparation for your duties, if you would meet with less interruption in your duties.* The very light of nature teaches solemn preparation to all important and weighty business: And is there more solemn and concerning business in all the world, than that which thou transactest with God in duties? Angels approach not this God with whom thou hast to do, without profound respects to his immense greatness and awful holiness, Isa. vi. 3. When you stretch forth your hands, it is required that you first prepare your hearts, Job xi. 13, 14.

Rule 2. *Realize the presence of God in all your duties, and awe your hearts all that you are able by that consideration.* O think what a piercing holy eye beholds thy heart, and tries thy reins! Wouldst thou not be really ashamed, if thy thoughts were but vocal to men, and the workings and wanderings of thy heart visible to those that join with thee in the same duty? O, if the presence of God were more realized, certainly your hearts would be better secured against the incursions of your corruptions.

Rule 3. *Labour for a deeper measure and degree of sanctification;* many other rules are but spiritual anodynes to give present ease, but this is the way to a real cure. A thousand things may be found helpful to put by a vain thought for the present, but then it returns again, and it may be with more strength: This is the proper method to dry the spring, when others are but attempts to divert the stream: If habits of grace were more deeply radicated, acts of grace would be more easy to us, and flow more freely from us.

Rule 4. Lastly, *Consider what an aggravation it is to your evil, to vent itself in the special presence of God in duties.* See how Paul mourns over it in the text: It is not only a sin, but an affronting of God to his face: This grieving of his Spirit is the spoil of thy duty; it is (as one aptly calls it) *obex infernalis*, an hellish bar or *remora* to all sweet and free intercourse of the soul with God.

3. For *Consolation.* But whilst I am representing the evil of it to some, it may be there are others overwhelmed with the sorrowful sense of it, even to discouragement and despondency: Poor Christian! is this thy case? Are all the afflictions in the world nothing to thee, in comparison with this evil which is present with thee, when thou wouldest do good? Well, though thou canst not do the good thou wouldest, nor free thyself yet from the evil thou wouldest, rather than live, be freed from, there are four things that may give much relief to thy pensive soul.

1. *Though the presence of evil, even in thy best duties, be sad, yet thy grief and affliction for it is sweet:* This is a sad sin, but this is a sweet sign. It is not heart-evils, heart-wanderings in duties, hardness and unbelief, that hypocrites mourn for, but more gross and



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.*

**F**ROM 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