

25. no, nor with Christ himself, till thou comest to the full enjoyment of him in heaven. The believer knows, how sweet soever his communion with Christ is in this world, yet that communion he shall have with Christ in heaven, will far excel it: there it will be more intimate and immediate, 1 Cor. xii. 12. more full and perfect, even to satisfaction, Psal. xvii. 15. more constant and continued, not suffering such interruptions as it doth here, Rev. xxi. 25. more pure and unmixed; here our corruptions work with our graces, Rom. vii. 21. but there grace shall work alone: in a word, more durable and perpetual; we shall *be ever with the Lord*, 1 Thess. iv. 7. Long therefore to *drink that new wine in the Father's kingdom*. 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and let him that heareth, say, Come. Even so, come Lord Jesus; come quickly.'



THE ELEVENTH
MEDITATION,

UPON CANT. viii. 6.

Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.

THIS book is a sacred allegory: the sense thereof is deep and spiritual. Our unacquaintedness with such schemes and figures of speech, together with the want of spiritual light and experience, makes it difficult to be understood; but the allegory being once unfolded by reason of its affinity with the fancy, truth is more easily and affectingly transmitted, both to the mind and heart.

St. Augustin assigns this reason, why we are so much delighted with metaphors and allegories; because they are so much proportioned to our senses, with which our reason hath contracted an intimacy and familiarity: and therefore God, to accommodate his truth to our capacity, doth, as it were, embody it in earthly expressions; according to that of the ancient Cabbalists, *Lumen supremum nunquam descendit sine idumento*; heavenly truth never descendeth to us without its veil and covering.

The words before us, are the request of the spouse to Jesus Christ; and consists of two parts, viz.

1. Her suit; which is earnest.
2. Her argument; which is weighty.

1. Her earnest suit, or request to Jesus Christ: 'Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm.' The heart of Christ notes his most dear, inward, and tender affection; his arm notes his protecting and preserving care and power. The last naturally follows the first; what men dearly affect, they tenderly and carefully protect.

And by *setting her as a seal upon his heart and arm*, she means a sure and a well-confirmed interest, both in his love and power; this she would have firmly sealed and ratified: and that this is her meaning, will plainly appear from

The argument with which she enforces her request: 'For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave,' &c.

By jealousy, we must understand her fears and suspicions of coming short of Christ and his love; q. d. What if after all I should be deceived? What if Jesus Christ do not love me with a special love? O these fears and suspicions are intolerable torments to her; she cannot bear them: they are cruel as the grave; insufferable as coals of fire, which have a most vehement flame; q. d. Lord, if thou leave me in the midst of these jealousies of thy love, I shall be but a torment to myself; I shall live as one upon the rack, or in the flames. Hence the note is,

Doct. That there is nothing in this world, which true Christians more earnestly desire, than to be well assured and satisfied of the love of Jesus Christ to their souls.

In the meditation of this point, two things must be enquired into:

1. Why this assurance is so desirable.

2. How it may be obtained.

1. Why the assurance of the love of Christ is so desirable in the eyes of true Christians. And among others, there are two things that especially make it so: viz.

1. The sweetness of its enjoyment.

2. The difficulty of its attainment.

The sweetness of its enjoyment, which is inexpressible, and inconceivable; for it is a mercy above all estimation. It is,

1. The riches of faith.

2. The rest and ease of the heart.

3. The pleasure of life.

4. A cordial at death.

5. A sweet support in all troubles.

1. It is the very riches of faith, the most pleasant fruit which grows upon the top branches of faith. The scripture tells us of an assurance of understanding, hope, and faith. All these graces are precious in themselves; but the assurance of each of them is the most sweet and pleasant part. Knowledge, above knowledge, is the full assurance of knowledge: hope above hope, is the full assurance of hope: and faith above faith, is the full assurance of faith. The least and lowest act of saving faith is precious, and above all value; what then must the highest and most excellent acts of faith be? Certainly,

there is a sweetness in the assurance of faith, that few men have the privilege to taste; and they that do, can find no words able to express it to another's understanding. The weakest Christian is exalted above all other men; but the assured Christian hath a preference before all other Christians.

2. It is heart's ease; the very sabbath and sweet repose of the soul. Thousands of poor Christians would part with all they possess in this world, to enjoy it; but it flies from them. The life that most of them live, is a life betwixt hopes and fears; their interest in Christ is very doubtful to them. Sometimes they are encouraged, from sensible workings of grace; then all is dashed again, by the contrary stirrings and workings of their own corruptions. Now the sun shines out clear, by and by the heavens are overcast and clouded again: but the assured Christian is at rest, from those tormenting fears and jealousies which my text speaks of, that are as cruel as the grave, and as insufferable as coals of fire in a man's bosom. He can take Christ into the arms of faith, and say, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his. Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee!'

3. It is the pleasure of life; yea, the most rational, pure, and transporting pleasure. What is life without pleasure? And what pleasure is there in the world, comparable to this pleasure? For let the sealed and assured believer consider, and compare; and he must needs find a joy and pleasure, beyond the joy of the whole earth. If he consider well what he is assured of, it is no common mercy, but Christ himself, and his love; a mercy incomprehensible by men or angels; Eph. iii. 19. Put Christ into the sensible possession of a believer, and joy is no more under his command for that time: he cannot forbear to rejoice; and especially when his thoughts are exercised in comparing states and conditions; either his own with other men's, or his own now, with what it was, and what it shall be. To think with thyself thus, I am assured of Christ, and his love: my interest in him is sealed; but this is a mercy few enjoy besides me. There be millions of souls of equal value with mine by nature, that shall never enjoy such a mercy as this. Yea, the time was, when I myself was far from it, in my unregenerated state. Lord, how is it I had not then been sealed to damnation? O, it is well with me for the present, that I can call Christ my own; and yet it will be better and better: my condition will mend every day. I am now in Christ; and it is but a little while, before I shall be with Christ, and arrive at the full satisfaction of my very heart. O, what pleasure doth every glance, backward or forward, give to the sealed soul.

4. It is a cordial in death; and there is none like it. This will make the soul triumph over the grave, take death cheerfully by the cold hand, welcome its grim messengers, and long to be gone, and be with Christ. Dark and doubting Christians may indeed shrink back from it, and be afraid of the exchange; but the assured soul longs to

be gone, and needs patience to live, as other men do to die. When one was asked, if he were willing to die? his answer was, *Illius est nolle mori, qui nolit ire ad Christum*; Let him be loth to die, that is loth to go to Christ: The sugar of assurance sweetens the bitter cup of death, and makes it delectable to a believer's relish.

5. In a word it is a sweet support, in all the troubles and afflictions on this side the grave. Let the assured soul be cast into what condition the Lord pleases; be it upon a bed of sickness; yet this gives his soul such support and comfort, that he shall not say, I am sick. Sin being forgiven, the soul is well, when the body is in pain, Isa. xxxiii. 24. Let him be cast into a prison, here is that which will turn a prison into a paradise, Acts v. 41. Let him be pinched with outward want; this will supply all: "As having nothing, and yet possessing "all things," 2 Cor. vi. 10. Thus you see how desirable it is for its own excellency.

2. And as it is desirable for the sweetness of its own enjoyment, so also from the difficulty of its attainment. All excellencies are locked up under many difficulties; but none like this. It is indeed easy to presume an interest in Christ, and cheat a man's own soul with a dream and fancy of our own creation; but it is hard to get a sealed clear title to Christ and his benefits. And there be, among others, three things that make it difficult.

(1.) The corruptions that remain, and daily work in the best hearts; these are evermore puzzling and fearing the poor soul, with fears and doubts about its condition. Grace teacheth men due severity to themselves; and fear of their own deceitfulness, makes them think no hearts are like their hearts; especially whilst they compare other men's outside with their own inside, as generally they do. Oh, how do our own corruptions every moment raise mists and clouds that it is a wonder we ever should have one clear beam of assurance shining into such hearts, as our hearts are!

(2.) The multitudes of mistakes and cheats that are frequently committed, and found in this matter, makes upright hearts the more suspicious and doubtful of their own condition. O when they read Mat. vii. 22. that many will say to Christ in that day, *Lord we have prophesied in thy name, &c.* it scares them, lest they also be deceived.

(3.) The grand importance of the matter, makes poor souls fearful of concluding certainly about it. O when a man considers, that the whole weight of his eternal happiness or misery, depends upon the resolution of these questions, Am I in Christ; or am I not! it will make him tremble to determine. In a word, assurance is not in our power, or at our command. There be many holy, humble, diligent, and longing souls, to whom it is denied: it is arbitrarily dispensed by the pleasure of the Spirit, to whom he will: and such favours are rare, even among true believers; the more therefore it is to be valued and desired by all, as the spouse doth in this place. And so much to

the first thing; *Upon what account the assurance of Christ's love is so desirable in the eyes of Christians.*

2. In the last place, let us consider, how this mercy, which is so desirable, may be obtained; And this is our proper work and business at this time.

You are now come to a sealing ordinance, instituted on purpose for this noble end and use. O that we would pray and plead for it, as the spouse here doth! "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave," &c. Now, in order to the attainment of this most desirable mercy, take a few necessary hints of your present work and duty, in the following directions.

Direction I. Would you be well secured of Christ's love to you, and that you are *set as a seal upon his heart*? Then exercise and manifest more love to Christ, and let him be much upon your hearts. If it be clear to you, that you have true love to Jesus Christ, you need not at all to doubt, but you are in his heart, and in his love: *I love them that love me*, Prov. viii. 17. And surely you have now before you the greatest motive in the world, to inflame your love to Jesus Christ. Behold him as he is here represented to you, *wounded for your iniquities*; yea, sacrificed to the wrath of God, for your peace, pardon, and salvation! "O what manner of love is this! Behold how he loved thee!" If Christ's love draw forth thine, it will so far clear thy interest in his love, as it shall engage thy heart in love to him.

Direction II. But seeing the activity of your love will be according to the activity of your faith; therefore, in the next place, I advise you to make it the main work and business of this hour, to exercise your faith upon Jesus Christ. Set yourselves this day to believe: The more strong the direct acts of your faith shall be, the more clear and comfortable its reflex acts are like to be.

There are three distinct offices, or employments for your faith, at this table, viz.

1. To realize.

2. To apply.

3. To infer, from the sufferings of Jesus Christ.

1. To realize the sufferings of Christ for you, and behold them here represented in a true glass to the eye of faith. See you that bread broken, and that wine poured out? As sure as this is so, Jesus Christ endured the cross, suffered the wrath of the great and terrible God, in his soul, and in his body, upon the cursed tree, for, and in the room of poor condemned sinners. Your faith for the one hath as much, yea, more certainty, than your senses hath for the other. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," 1 Tim. i. 15. "And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh," &c. 1 Tim. iii. 16.

2. Apply the sufferings of Christ this day to thine own soul: Be-

lieve all this to be done and suffered in thy room, and for thy sake. He offered not this sacrifice for his own sins, but ours: Isa. liii. 9. Heb. vii. 27. He was incarnate for you, Isa. ix. 6. "For us a child is born; to us a son is given." His death was for you, and in your stead, Gal. iii. 13. "He was made a curse for us;" and when he arose from the dead, "he rose for our justification," Rom. iv. 25. And now he is in glory, at the right hand of God, he is there for us, Heb. vii. 25. "He ever lives, to make intercession for us." It was the pride, passion, earthliness, and unbelief of thy heart, which Jesus Christ groaned, bled, and died, to procure a pardon for.

3. Infer from the sufferings of Christ, those conclusions of faith that tend to assurance. As thus: Did Christ die for me, when I was an enemy? Then surely, being reconciled, I shall be saved by his life, Rom. v. 10. Again; If Christ died for me? Then I shall never die eternally. Nothing shall "separate me from the love of God; it is Christ that died," Rom. viii. 34.

Direction III. Mourn over all those sins, that cause the Lord to hide his face from your souls. Have you grieved the Spirit by your sins? O be grieved for it this day at your very hearts; cover the table of the Lord with tears: "Look upon him whom you have pierced, and mourn as for an only son." Though there be no merit, yet there is much mercy in a broken heart for sin; and there is no such advantage to get your hearts broken, as this is, which is now before you. When the shower of repentance is fallen, the heavens over thee may be clear, and the sun shine out in its brightness upon thy soul.

Direction IV. In a word; pour out thy soul to God, in hearty desires, for a sealed and clear interest in his love this day: Tell him, it is mercy thou valuest above life; *thy favour is better than life*, Ps. lxxiii. 3. Tell him, thou art not able to live with the jealousies and suspicions of his love; thou art but a torment to thyself, whilst thy interest in his love abides under a cloud. Beseech him to pity thy poor afflicted soul, which hath lain down and risen so long with these fears and tremblings, and been a stranger to comfort for so many days. Tell him, how weak thy hands have been, and still are, in duties of obedience, for want of this strength and encouragement. Engage thy soul to him this day, to be more active, cheerful, and fruitful in his service; if it will please him now, to free thee from those fears and doubts, that have clogged thee in all thy former duties. O, cry unto him in the words, and with the deep sense of the spouse in this text; "Set me as a seal upon thy heart, (which hath a most vehement heat,) as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire," &c.