

Adam's covenant, one of the highest concernments of a Christian, the baptism only of adult believers another. My consequences from your words, are just and regular, how surprising soever they seem to you.

If you think fit to rejoin to this my answer, I desire you will avoid, as much as you can, a tedious harangue of words, and speak strictly and regularly to my arguments, by limiting, distinguishing, or denying, as a disputant ought to do: If so, I promise you a reply; but if I find no such thing, it shall pass with me but for waste paper; nor will I waste time about it. The Lord give us unity in things necessary, liberty in things indifferent, and charity in all things!

SACRAMENTAL MEDITATIONS

UPON DIVERS SELECT PLACES OF

SCRIPTURE:

WHEREIN

BELIEVERS are assisted in preparing their HEARTS, and exciting their AFFECTIONS and GRACES, when they draw nigh to GOD in that most awful and solemn ORDINANCE of the LORD'S SUPPER.

TO THE READER.

Christian Reader,

CHRIST may be said to be crucified three ways; by the Jews *actually*, in the sacrament *declaratively*, and by unbelievers at his table *interpretatively*. Among sins, blood-guiltiness is reckoned one of the most heinous; and of all blood-guiltiness, to be guilty of the blood of Christ, is a sin of the deepest guilt, and will be avenged with the most dreadful punishment, 1 Cor. x. 27, 29. If vengeance be taken seven-fold on him that slew Cain, what vengeance shall be taken on him that *crucifies afresh the Lord of glory*?

The heaviest blow of divine justice is still ready to avenge the abuse of the best mercy: what can the heart of man conceive more solemn, more sacred, or more deeply affective, than the representation of the most gracious love of the Father, and the most grievous passion of the Son? What sin can be more provoking to God, than the slight and contempt of those most awful mysteries? And what punishment can be more terrible, than for such a wretched soul to eat and drink dam-

nation to itself? Melancthon records a very dreadful example of God's righteous judgment upon a company of profane wretches, who, in a tragedy, intended to act the death of Christ upon the cross. He that acted the soldier's part, instead of piercing with a spear a bladder full of blood hid under his garment, wounded him to death that was upon the cross, who falling down killed him, who (in a disguise) acted the part of the woman that stood wailing under the cross. His brother, who was first slain slew the murderer, who acted the soldier's part, and for slaying him was hanged by order of justice. Thus did the vengeance of God speedily overtake them, and hanged them up in chains, for a warning, to all that should ever dare to dally with the great and jealous God.

These are terrible strokes, and yet not so terrible as those which are more ordinarily, but less sensibly, inflicted on the inner man for the abuse of this ordinance.

To prevent these judgments, and obtain those blessings which come through this ordinance, great regard must be had to two things, viz. 1. The in-being. 2. The activity of true grace.

First, Examine thyself, reader, whether there be any gracious principle planted in thy soul, whereby thou art alive indeed unto God. It was an ancient abuse of the sacrament (condemned and cast out by the * Carthaginian council) to give it unto dead men. Dead souls can have no communion with the living God, no more benefit from this table than the Emperor's guests had from his table, where loaves of gold were set before them to eat. There is more than a shew of grace in the sacrament: it hath not only the visible sign, but the spiritual grace also, which it represents. See that there be more than a shew and a visible sign of grace also in thy soul, when thou comest nigh to the Lord in that ordinance: see to the exercise and activity, as well as to the truth and sincerity of thy grace.

Even a believer himself doth not eat and drink worthily, unless the grace that is in him be excited and exercised at this ordinance.

It is not faith inhering, but faith, realizing, applying and powerfully working. It is not a disposition to humiliation for sin, but the actual thawing and melting of the heart for sin; 'whilst thou lookest on him whom thou hast pierced, and mournest for him as one that mourneth for his only son, for his first-born:' nor is it a disposition or principle of love to Christ that is only required, but the stirring up of that fire of love, the exciting of it into a vehement flame.

I know the excitations and exercises of grace are attended with great difficulties: they are not things within our command, and at our beck. Oh! it is hard, it is hard indeed, reader, even after God hath taken the heart of stone out of thee, and given thee an heart of flesh, to mourn actually for sin, even when so great an occasion

* Concil. Carthag. Can. 6. *Placuit ut defunctorum corporibus non detur eucharistia, &c.*

and call is given thee to that work at the Lord's table; for the same power is requisite to excite the act that was required to plant the habit. *Gratia gratiam postulat.*

However, the duty is thine, though the power be God's; why else are his people blamed, because they stirred not up themselves to take hold of him? Isa. lxiv. 7.

To assist thee in this work, some help is offered in the following meditations: it is true, it is not the reading of the best meditations another can prepare for thee, that will alter the temper of thy heart, except the Spirit of God concur with these truths, and bless them to thy soul: but yet these helps must not be slighted, because they are not self-sufficient. 'Man lives not by bread alone; but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God;' yet it were a fond vanity, and sin, for any man, upon that ground, to cast away bread, and expect to live by a miracle without it. We must lift up our hearts to God for a blessing, and then eat. Do the same here; first pray; then read; and the Lord quicken thee by it for duty.

There are two things of special concernment to thee, reader, when thou art to address thyself to any solemn duty, especially such as this.

1. Prepare for thy duty diligently.

2. Rely not upon thy preparations.

1. Prepare with all diligence for thy duty. Take pains with thy dull heart; cleanse thy polluted heart; compose thy vain heart; remember how great a presence thou art approaching. If *Augustus thus reproved one, that entertained him without suitable preparation, saying, 'I did not think we had been so familiar;' much more may thy God reprove thee, for thy careless neglect of due preparation for him.

2. But yet take heed, on the other side, that thou rely not upon thy best preparation. It is an ingenious, and true note of Luther,† (speaking to this very point of preparation for the sacrament) 'Never are men more unfit, than when they think themselves most fit, and best prepared for their duty; never more fit, than when most humbled and ashamed, in a sense of their own unfitness.'

That the blessing of God, and the breathings of his good Spirit, may accompany these poor labours to thy soul, is the heart's desire of,

Thy servant in Christ,

JOHN FLAVEL.

* *Non putabam me tibi tam familiarem.*

† *Tunc passime dispositus, quando optissime.*

THE FIRST
MEDITATION,

UPON

PSALM lxxxix. 7. *God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are about him.*

THERE are special seasons; wherein the saints approach near unto God in this life, and wherein the Lord comes near unto them.

It pleaseth the Majesty of heaven, sometimes to admit poor worms of the earth to such sensible and sweet perceptions of himself, as are found above all expression, and seem to be a transient glance upon that glory, which glorified eyes more steadily behold above: 'Believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory;' or, *glorified joy; as it is, 1 Pet. i. 8. And yet how sweet and excellent soever these foretastes of heaven are, heaven itself will be an unspeakable surprize to the saints, when they shall come thither.

Now among all those ordinances, wherein the blessed God manifests himself to the children of men, none are found to set forth more of the joy of his presence, than that of the Lord's Supper: at that blessed table, are such sensible embraces betwixt Christ and believers, as do afford delight and solace, beyond the joy of the whole earth.

And where such special manifestations of God are, suitable dispositions and preparations should be found on our part, to meet the Lord.

And, certainly, we shall find reason enough for it, if we will consider the importance of this scripture before us; 'God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him.' Wherein we have, 1. The object: 2. The subject: 3. The mode of divine worship.

First, The object of worship, God; God is to be feared. In all divine worship, men and angels have to do with God. "All things (saith the apostle) are open and naked to the eyes of him with whom we have to do," Heb. iv. 14. With whom we have speech, or business; so it may be understood. When we worship, we draw nigh to God; and that about the greatest concerns, and weightiest business in the world.

* *Διγαλλίασε χάρα ανεκλαητω και διδασμενη. Innerrabili, & glorificate. Montanus.*

Secondly, The subject, or the person that approaches unto God in his worship; "His saints, and all that are about him." By saints, many interpreters do (in this place) understand the angels, called saints, from the purity and holiness of their nature; and so make the next clause exegetical of this. Those that before were called saints in respect of their nature, are, in the next words said to be such as are round about him, his satellites, attendants, or those that stand as servants about him, to do his pleasure; where they are described by their office. Both these seem to be grounded upon the precedent verses: "Who in heaven can be compared to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty," (or of God, so the angels are called, Job i. 6.) "can be likened to the Lord?" And though it be true, that the angels worship, and serve the Lord with the greatest reverence and dread (for these are his high ones, or such as are round about him;) yet there is no necessity to limit this scripture so narrowly, by excluding the people of God on earth; they also are his saints, and more frequently so stiled, though they be saints of a lower class and order: and they also are round about him as well as the angels; and when they worship him, he is in the midst of them, Mat. xviii. 20. And the place where they assemble to worship, is called the place of his feet, Isa. lx. 13. But if we find not the saints on earth in the direct and immediate sense of this text, yet we must needs meet them in the rebound and consequence. For if creatures so much above us, as the angels, do perform their service, and pay their homage to the highest Majesty with so much fear and reverence; shall not inferior creatures, the poor worms of the earth, tremble at his presence? And this brings us to the third thing; namely,

Thirdly, The mode, or manner, in which the worship of God is to be performed; viz. with great fear and reverence: "God is greatly to be feared." Piscator translates it, *Vehementer formidandus*, to be vehemently feared; and opposes it to that formal, careless, trifling, vain spirit, which too often is found in those that approach the Lord in the duties of his worship. The observation from hence will be this:

Observation. *That the greatest composedness and seriousness of spirit is due to God, from all those that draw nigh unto him in his worship.*

And this is no more than what the Lord expressly requires at our hands; Lev. x. 3. "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh unto me." So Heb. xii. 28, 29. "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence, and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire."

And as this disposition and temper of spirit is due to every act and part of God's worship; so (to accommodate this general to our particular occasion) it is especially due to this great and solemn ordinance of the Lord's supper.

It is the observation of the Casuists, that *sacramentum et mortis arti-*

culus aquiparanter : The sacrament of the Lord's supper, and the very point of death, require equal seriousness : a man's spirit should be as deeply solemn and composed at the Lord's table, as upon a death-bed. We should go to that ordinance, as if we were then going into another world.

The primitive Christians used to sit up whole nights in meditation and prayer, before their participation of the Lord's supper; and these nights were called *Vigiliae*, their *watches*. Such was the reverence the saints had for this ordinance (which they usually called *mysterium tremendum*, a tremendous mystery,) that they would not give "sleep to their eyes, or slumber to their eye-lids," when so great and solemn a day drew near. *Chrysost. lib. 3. de sacerdot.*

And that all this solemn preparation is no more than needs, will convincingly appear to us, upon the following grounds and reasons.

Reason 1. From the solemn nature and ends of this ordinance. For what is the express design and use of it, but a lively representation of the Lord's death? 1 Cor. xi. 26. As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Jesus Christ is therein set forth crucified before us; and not to make a bare representation of it to us, as a thing wherein we have no personal interest or concernment, but to represent his death lively, and seal our title to it firmly: "This is my body which is broken for you," verse 24.

Now, which of these is to be attended with a dead, careless, and slight spirit? Is it the representation of Christ's death? God forbid! Oh! if there be any subject of meditation in the world, able to drink up the very spirit of a man, this is it!

The sun fainted, the heavens mourned in black, the very rocks rent in pieces, when this tragedy was acted; and shall our hearts be more senseless and obdurate than they, at the representation of it? But, lo! here is more than a representation: Christ is set forth in this ordinance, as crucified for you; as suffering, and enduring all this, in your room and stead. Now,

Suppose, reader, thyself to be justly condemned to the torture of the rack, or strappado; and that thy father, brother, or dearest friend, preferring thy life to his own, would become thy *ANTISYXOS*, *ransomers*, by undergoing the torment for thee; and all that is left for thee to suffer, were only by way of sympathy with him: suppose now thyself standing by that engine of torture, and beholding the members of thy dear friend distorted, and all out of joint; hearing his doleful groans, extorted by the extremity of anguish; and under all these torments, still maintaining a constant love to thee; not once repenting his torments for thee; couldst thou stand there with dry eyes? Could thy heart be unaffected, and stupid at such a sight? Write him rather a beast, a stone, than a man, that could do so.

But this is not all; the believer's interest in Christ is sealed, as well as the sufferings of Christ represented, in this ordinance.

And is a sealed interest in Christ so cheap or common a thing, as that it should not engage, yea, swallow up all the powers of thy soul? Oh! what is this? what is this?

The seal of God, set to the soul of a poor sinner, to confirm and ratify its title to the person of Christ, and the inestimable treasures of his blood. Surely, as the sealing up of a man to damnation, is the sum of all misery; and that poor creature that is so sealed, hath cause enough to mourn and wail to eternity; so the sealing up of a soul to salvation, is the sum of all mercy, and happiness; and the soul that is so sealed, hath cause enough to lie at the feet of God, overwhelmed with the sense of so invaluable a mercy.

Reason 2. As the nature and ends of this ordinance call for the greatest composedness of spirit; so the danger of unworthy receiving, should work our hearts to the most serious frame: for if a man be here without his wedding garment, if he eat and drink unworthily it is at the greatest peril of his soul that he doth so; 1 Cor. 11. 27. "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."

To profane and undervalue that body and blood of the Lord, is a sin above measure sinful; and the punishments of such sins, will be the most dreadful: for still the more excellent the blessings are that come by any ordinance, the more dreadful the curses are that avenge the abuse of such mercies. How soon may a man draw fearful guilt upon his soul, and dreadful judgments upon his body, by an heedless management of such sacred mysteries? "For this cause many are weak and "sickly among you, and many sleep;" verse 30.

It is a most weighty *note*, that a * worthy pen sets upon this scripture: 'They discerned not the body of his Son Jesus Christ, in his ordinances; but instead of that holy, reverend, and deep-dyed behaviour, which was due to it, both from their inner and outward man, as being a creature of the highest and deepest sanctification, that ever God sanctified; sanctified not only to a more excellent and glorious condition; but also to many ends and purposes, of far higher and dearer concernment, both for the glory of God, and benefit of men themselves, than all other creatures whatsoever, whether in heaven or earth: They handled, and dealt by it in both kinds, as if it had been a common unsanctified thing: Thus they discerned not the Lord's body.'

And as they discerned not his body, so neither did God (in some sense) discern theirs: but in those sore strokes and heavy judgments which he inflicted on them, had them in no other regard or consideration, than as if they had been the bodies of his enemies, the bodies of wicked and sinful men; thus drawing the model and platform of their punishment (as usually he doth) from the structure and proportion of their sin.

* Mr. Thomas Goodwin's epistle to Mr. Fenner's sermons.

Thus the just and righteous God builds up the breaches that we make upon the honour belonging to the body of his Son, with the ruins of that honour which he had given unto ours, in health, strength, life, and many other outward comforts and supports.

O then what need is there of a most awful and composed spirit, when we approach the Lord in this ordinance?

Reason 3. As the danger of unworthy receiving should compose us to the greatest seriousness, so the remembrance of that frame and temper Christ's Spirit was in, when he actually suffered those things for us, should compose our spirits, into a frame more suitable and agreeable to his. When we see his death, as it were acted over again before our eyes, was his heart roving and wandering in that day? Did he not regard and mind the work he was going about? Was his heart, like thine, stupid, and unaffected with these things? Look but upon that text, Luke xxii. 44. and you shall see whether it were so, or not. It is said (when this tragedy drew nigh, and his enemies were ready to seize him in the garden) That being 'in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground.' And Mat. xxvi. 38. he saith, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' His *soul* was full of sorrow: And is thine full of stupidity? God forbid!

If thy heart be cold, Christ's was hot: If thou canst not shed a tear, he poured out clods of blood from every part. O, how unsuitable is a dry eye, and hard heart, to such an ordinance as this!

Reason 4. As the frame Christ's Spirit was in at his death, should command the most solemn frame upon our spirits, at the recognizing of it; so the things here represented, require, and call for the highest exercise of every grace of the Spirit in our souls: For we come not thither as idle spectators, but as active instruments, to glorify God, by exercising every grace upon Christ, as crucified for us. Behold here are, among the rest,

First, The proper object of faith.

Secondly, The flowing spring of repentance.

Thirdly, The powerful attractive of love.

First, The proper object of faith is here. This ordinance, as a glass, represents to thine eye that glorious Person, of whom the Father said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,' Mat. xvii. 5. Of whom he said, 'I have laid help upon one that is mighty.' This was he that was made sin for us, who had no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Cor. v. 21. Who trode the wine-press alone, and is here to be seen in his red garments. Every drop of his precious blood hath a tongue, calling for faith to behold it, poured forth as a sacrifice to God for sin. 'This (saith he) is the cup of the New Testament in my blood, which was shed for many, for the remission of sins.'

And what footing could thy faith find for pardon and salvation any

where else? It is Christ crucified that faith clasps, as the last and only hope and refuge of a poor sinner: Here all believers drop anchor. This is that blessed object, on whom they take the dead gripe, or last grasp, when their eye-strings are breaking. When you see the blood of Christ flowing forth, how can faith be silent in thy soul? When he bids thee, as it were, to put thy finger into his side, shews thee his hands and his feet there; it will cry out in thy soul, *My Lord! and my God!*

Secondly, The flowing spring of repentance is here. If there be any fire that can melt, or hammer that can break a hard heart, here it is; Zech. xii. 10. "They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced and mourn." Nothing lays a gracious soul lower in itself, than to see how low Christ was laid in his humiliation for it.

Here the evil of sin is also represented in the clearest glass, than ever the eye of man saw it in. The sufferings of the Son of God discover the evil of sin, more than the everlasting torments of the damned can do. So that, if there be but one drop of spiritual sorrow in the heart of a Christian; here, methinks, it should be seen dropping from the eye of faith.

Thirdly, The most attractive object of love is here. Put all created beauties, excellencies, and perfections together; and what are they but blackness and deformity, compared with the lovely Jesus? *My beloved* (saith the enamoured spouse) *is white and ruddy*, Cant. vi. 10. Behold him at the table, in his perfect innocence, and unparalleled sufferings! This is he who was rich, but for our sakes became poor; that we, through his poverty might be rich,' 2 Cor. viii. 9. This is he that parted with his honour first, and his life next; yea, he parted with his honour in his incarnation, that he might be capable to part with his life for our redemption.

Behold here the degrees of his sufferings, and by them measure the degrees of his love. Behold in his death, as in the deluge, all the fountains beneath, and the windows of heaven above, opened; the wrath of God, the cruelty of men, the fury of hell, breaking in together upon him, and his soul surrounded with sorrow; and how can this be represented, and thy soul not astonished at this amazing, matchless love of Christ? Surely one flame doth not more naturally produce another, than the love of Christ, thus represented to a gracious soul, doth produce love to Christ, and that in the most intense degree.

Use 1. How naturally doth this doctrine shame and humble the best hearts, for their sinful discomposures, vanity, and deadness; for the rovings and wanderings of their hearts, even when they come near the Lord in such a solemn ordinance as this is?

The holiest man upon earth may lay his hand upon his breast, and say, 'Lord, how unsuitable is this heart of mine, to such an object of faith, as is here presented to me? Doth such a temper of spirit suit thine awful presence? Should the represented agonies and sufferings

of Christ for me, be beheld with a spirit no more concerned, pierced, and wounded for sin? O how can I look upon him whom I have pierced, and not mourn, and be in bitterness for him, as for an only son, a first-born! O the stupifying and benumbing power of sin! O the efficacy of unbelief!

It was charged upon the Israelites, as the great aggravation of their sin, that they “provoked God at the sea, even at the red sea,” Psal. cvi. 7. the place where their miraculous salvation was wrought. But, Lord Jesus! my hard heart provokes thee in an higher degree, even at the *red sea* of thy precious invaluable blood, by which my eternal salvation was wrought. O my God! what a heart have I! Did the blood of Christ run out so freely and abundantly for me? and cannot I shed one tear for my sins, that pierced him! O let me never be friends with my own heart, till it love Christ better, and hate sin more.

Use 2. This scripture hath also an awakening voice, to all that come nigh to God in any of his ordinances, especially in this ordinance. O Christians! bethink yourselves where you are, and what you are doing: Know you not, that the King comes in to see the guests? Yea, you do know, that God is in this place; an awful Majesty beholds you! ‘All the churches shall know, that I am he that searcheth the heart and the reins, and will give to every one as his work shall be,’ Rev. ii. 23.

Thy business, Christian, is not with men, but with God; and the solemnest business that ever thy thoughts were conversant about. Thou art here to recognize the sufferings of thy Redeemer; to take the seals and pledges of thy salvation from the hand of his Spirit: Imagine the same thing, which is now to be done spiritually, and by the ministry of faith, were but to be performed visibly and audibly, by the ministry of thy senses.

Suppose Jesus Christ did personally shew himself at this table, and were pleased to make himself known in the breaking of bread, as once he did to the disciples. Suppose thou sawest him appear at this table as he doth now appear in heaven, *as a Lamb that had been slain*: Imagine thou heardest him say, ‘Believer, this precious blood of mine was shed for thee: There be millions of men and women in the world, naturally as good as thee, that shall have no interest in it, or benefit by it: But for thee, it was shed, and for the remission of thy sins; my blood was the only thing in the world that was equal to the desert of thy sins, and it hath made full satisfaction to God for them all: Thy sins, which are many, are therefore forgiven thee: My blood hath purchased the eternal inheritance of glory for thee; and this day I am come to deliver the seals and pledges thereof into thine hand. Take then the seals of eternal salvation this day, take thine own Christ with all that he is, and hath; in thine arms. Whatever I have suffered, done, or procured for any of my saints; I have suffered, done, and procured the same for thee.’

Why, all this is here to be done as really and truly, though in a more spiritual way, at this table. And shall not such business as this is, fully fix and engage thy heart? What then shall do it?

Awake, faith; awake, repentance; awake, love; yea, let all the powers of my soul be thoroughly awakened this day to attend the Lord.

THE SECOND

MEDITATION,

UPON JEREMIAH xii. 2.

Thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.

THIS scripture gives us the character and description of an hypocrite: And he is here described two ways; viz.

1. By what he hath.
2. By what he hath not.

First, The hypocrite is described by what he hath: He hath God in his mouth; 'Thou art near in their mouth;' i. e. They profess with a full mouth, that they are thy people, saith Piscator; or, they speak much about the law (as another explains it;) God, and his temple, religion, with its rites, are much talked of among them; they have him in their prayers and duties; and this is all that the hypocrite hath of God; religion only sanctifies his tongue; that seems to be dedicated to God; but it penetrates no further. And therefore,

Secondly, He is described by that he hath not, or by what he wants; *And* (or, but) *thou art far from their reins*: i. e. They feel not the power and influences of that name, which they so often invoke and talk of, going down to their very reins, and affecting their very hearts. So we must understand this metaphorical expression here, as the opposition directs: For the reins, having so great and sensible a sympathy with the heart, (which is the seat of the affections and passions,) upon that account, it is usual in scripture, to put the reins for those intimate and secret affections, thoughts, and passions of the heart, with which they have so near cognation, and so sensible a sympathy. When the heart is under great consternation, the loins or reins are seized also. As Dan. v. 6. Then the "king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, and the joints of his loins were loosed." On the contrary, when the heart is filled with delight and gladness, the reins are said to rejoice; Prov. xxiii. 16. "Yea,

my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right :” *Totus latitia dissiliam* ; “ I shall even leap for joy.” So then, when the prophet saith, “ God is far from the reins of the hypocrite,” the meaning is, he feels not the heart-affecting influence and power of religion upon his heart and affections, as God’s people do. And hence the note will be,

Doct. *That God comes nearer to the hearts and reins of his people in their duties, than he doth to any hypocritical, or formal professor.*

By God’s nearness, we understand not his omnipresence (that neither comes nor goes) nor his love to his people (that abides ;) but the sensible, sweet manifestations and outlets of it to their souls. So in Psal. cxlv. 18. “ The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon him, unto all that call upon him in truth.”

Note, the restriction and limitation of this glorious privilege ; it is the peculiar enjoyment of sincere and upright-hearted worshippers. Others may have communion with duties, but not with God in them.

But that God comes nigh, very nigh, to upright hearts in their duties, is a truth as sensibly manifest to spiritual persons, as that they are nigh the fire, when they feel the comfortable heat of it refreshing them in a cold season, when they are almost starved and benumbed with cold. Three things make this evident.

First, Sincere souls are sensible of God’s accesses to them in their duties, they feel his approaches to their spirits ; Lam. iii. 57. “ Thou drawest near in the day that I called upon thee ; thou saidst, Fear not.” And what a surprize was that to the church ; Cant. ii. 8. “ It is the voice of my beloved ; behold, he cometh,” &c. Certainly there is a felt presence of God, which no words can make another to understand ; they feel that fountain flowing abundantly into the dry pits, the heart fills apace, the empty thoughts swell with a fulness of spiritual things, which strive for vent.

Secondly, They are sensible of God’s recesses, and withdrawment from their spirits ; they feel how the ebb follows the flood, and how the waters abate. So you find it in Cant. v. 6. “ I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone ; my soul failed when he spake : I sought him, but I could not find him : I called, but he gave me no answer.” The Hebrew is very pathetic ; *He was gone, he was gone*. A sad change of the frame of her heart quickly followed.

Thirdly, The Lord’s nearness to the hearts and reins of his people in their duties, is evident to them from the effects that it leaves upon their spirits. For look as it is with the earth and plants, with respect to the approach or remove of the sun in the spring and autumn ; so it is here as Christ speaks, Luke xxi. 29. “ When ye see the fig-tree, and all the trees, shoot forth, ye know that summer is nigh at hand.” An approaching sun renews the face of the earth, and makes nature

smile. The trees bud and blossom, the fishes rise, the birds sing; it is a kind of resurrection to nature from the dead. So it is when the Lord comes near the hearts and reins of men in duty: For then they find that,

First, A real taste of the joy of the Lord is here given unto men, the fulness whereof is in heaven, * hence called, 2 Cor. i. 22. "The earnest of his Spirit." And 1 Pet. i. 8. *Glorified joy*, or a short salvation. Oh! what is this! what is this! Certainly it is something that hath no affinity with flesh, or gross corporeal pleasures; but it is of another nature, something which transcends all that ever was felt or tasted in this world, since we were first conversant among sensible objects.

Secondly, A mighty strength and power coming into their souls, and actuating all its faculties and graces. When God comes near, new powers enter the soul; the feeble is as David, Ps. cxxxviii. 3. "In the day that I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." Cant. i. 12. "Whilst the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard," &c. Hope was low, and faith was weak, little strength in any grace, except desires; but when the Lord comes, strength comes with him. Then as it is, Neh. viii. 10. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." O the vigorous sallies of the heart to God! Psal. lxiii. 8. "O the strength of love!" Cant. viii. 6. Duties are other manner of things than they were wont to be. "Did not our hearts burn within us!" Luke xxiv. 32.

Thirdly, A remarkable transformation and change of spirit follows it.

These things are found to be marvellously assimilating. The sights of God, the felt presence of God, is as fire, which quickly assimilates what is put into it to its own likeness. So 2 Cor. iii. 18. They are said to be "changed from glory to glory." It always leaves the mind more refined and abstracted from gross material things, and changed into the same image. They have a similitude of God upon them, who have God near unto their hearts and reins.

Fourthly, A vigorous working of the heart heaven-ward; a mounting of the soul upward. Now the soul shews that it hath not forgot its way home again. It is with such a soul as sensibly embraces Christ in the arms of faith, as it was with Simon, when he took him bodily into his arms. "Now (saith he) let thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." O it would have the wings of a dove, to fly away from this polluted world, this unquiet world, and be at rest.

Infer. 1. Then certainly there is an heaven, and a state of glory, for the saints. Heaven is no dream or night vision: It is sensibly tasted and felt by thousands of witnesses in this world; they are sure it is no mistake. God is with them of a truth, in the way of their duties: They

• Dr. Preston, when dying, said, I shall change my place, not my company.

do not only read of a glorified eye, but they have something of it, or like it in this world: "The pure in heart do here see God," Mat. v. 8. The saints have not only a witness without them in the word that there is a state of glory prepared for believers, but they have a witness in themselves. These are not the testimonies of crazed brains, but of the wisest and most serious of men; not a few, but a multitude of them; not conjecturally delivered, but upon taste, feeling, and trial. O blessed be God for such sensible confirmations, such sweet prelibations!

Infer. 2. But, oh! what is heaven? And what that state of glory reserved for the saints? Doth a glimpse of God's presence in a duty, go down to the heart and reins? O how unutterable then must that be which is seen and felt above, where God comes as near to man as can be! Rev. xxii. 3, 4. "The throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face." And 1 Thess. iv. 17. "And so we shall be ever with the Lord." O what is that! "Ever with the Lord?" Christians, what you feel and taste here by faith, is part of heaven's glory; but yet heaven will be an unspeakable surprisal to you, when you come thither for all that! "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," 1 John iii. 1, 2.

Infer. 3. See hence the necessity of casting these very bodies into a new mold by their resurrection from the dead, according to that, 1 Cor. xv. 41. "It is sown in weakness but raised in power." How else could it be a co-partner with soul in the ineffable joys of that presence above?

The state of this mortality cannot bear the fulness of that joy. Hold, Lord, stay thy hand, said a choice Christian once, thy creature is but a clay vessel, and can hold no more. If a transient glimpse of God here, be felt in the very reins, if it so work upon the very body by sympathy with the soul, O what vigorous spiritual bodies, doth the state of glory require! and such shall they be; Phil. iii. 12. "Like unto Christ's glorious body."

Infer. 4. Is God so near to his people above all others in the world? How good is it to be near to them that are so near to God? O, it would do a man's heart good to be near that person who hath lately had God near to his soul! Well might David say, Psalm xvi. 3. "All my delight is in the saints, and in the excellent of the earth." And again, Psal. cxix. 63. "I am a companion of all such as fear thee." O this is the beauty of Christian fellowship, this is the glory of that society! not the communication of their gifts, but the savour of God on their spirits. If any thing be alluring in this world, this is; 1 John i. 3. "That ye may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Christ Jesus." It is said, Zech. viii. 23. of the Jews, the time shall come, when there shall be such a presence of God among that people, that "ten men out of all languages shall take hold of the skirts of him that is a Jew;

saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you."

Christians, if there were more of God upon you, and in you, others would not be tempted to leave your society, and fall in with the men of the world; they would say, we will go with you, for God is with you.

Infer. 5. If God be so near to the heart and reins of his people in their duties, O how assiduous should they be in their duties? "It is good for me to draw nigh to God," Psalm lxxii. 28. Good indeed; the world cannot reward the expence of time at this rate, with all its glory; James iv. 8. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you: thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember thee in thy ways," Isa. lxiv. 5.

Obj. It would be an encouragement indeed, If I might thus meet God in the way of duty; but that is but seldom I can so meet God there, in sensible powerful outlets of his grace and love! I am most dead and cold there: I feel not communion with God going down to my heart and reins.

Sol. First, You draw nigh to God; but is it in truth, or in mere formality God is only nigh to such as call upon him in truth, Psalm cxlv. 18.

Secondly, If your hearts be sincere, yet are they not sluggish? Do you stir up yourselves to take hold of God? Many there be that do not; Isa. lxiv. 7. and Cant. v. 3, 5.

Thirdly, Have you not grieved the Spirit of God, and caused him to withdraw from you. O remember what pride and vanity hath been in you, after former manifestations; Ephes. iv. 40.

Fourthly, Nevertheless wait for God in his ways; his coming upon our souls is oftentimes, yea, mostly a surprizal to us; Cant. vi. 12. "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me as the chariots of Amminadib."

Infer. 6. What steady Christians should all real Christians be? For lo, what a seal and witness hath religion in the breast of every sincere professor of it? True Christians do not only hear by report, or learn by books, the reality of it; but feel by experience, and have a sensible proof of it in their very hearts and reins; their reins instruct them, as it is Psal. xvi. 7. They learn by spiritual sense and feeling, than which nothing can give greater confirmation in the ways of God.

There are two sorts of knowledge among men; one traditional, the other experimental: this last the apostle calls a "knowing in ourselves;" Heb. x. 34. and opposes it to that traditional knowledge which may be said to be without ourselves, because borrowed from other men.

Now this experience we have of the power of religion in our souls, is that only which fixes a man's spirit in the ways of godliness. It made the Hebrews take joyfully the spoiling of their goods; no arguments or temptations can wrest truth out of the hand of experience,

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.

THE THIRD
MEDITATION,

UPON ROM. vii. 21.

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

THIS 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.

† 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 withheld 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.

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?

Ans. 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?

Ans. 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*

nations. Lo, this is *God manifest in the flesh*. This is the great sacrifice, *the Lamb of God*: Never did human eyes behold such an object before.'

Secondly, The testimony itself: Which must be considered two ways; as it respects, 1. The truth and reality; 2. The virtue and dignity of Christ its object.

First, John's testimony respects the truth and reality of the object: *This is ο αμνος, the Lamb of God*; the very *antitype* to which all legal sacrifices had respect, and from which they derived all their value and virtue; *grace and truth came by Jesus Christ*, as he had said before, ver. 17. The paschal lamb and the lamb for daily sacrifice, were but the types and shadows of this *Lamb of God*.

Secondly, His testimony respects the virtue and dignity of Christ and his blood. *He taketh away the sin of the world*. The Greek αἰσεν (as *De Dieu*, a learned critic observes) answers both the Hebrew words, מִבְּרַל et נִשָּׂא Isa. liii. 4. which signify not only to *bear*, but to *bear away*; *Potando expiat, expiando aufert, efficitque ut remittatur*. By bearing sin, he expiates it; by expiating, takes it away, or procures the remission of it. The expression seems to allude to the *scape-goat*, mentioned, Lev. xvi. 22. Thus Christ really and wholly takes away the sin of the world; i. e. the sin of all believers in the world, for whom he was sacrificed, as Drusius well expounds it, concurring with the stream of sound expositors.

So that this is a very full testimony which John gives to Christ, and it is given with great affection and admiration of him: *Behold! yea, admire in beholding the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!* Behold him with affections suitable to such an object; *Ecce persona a Deo ordinata, in victimam ad expiandum peccata*, Grotius. Behold the person appointed by God, for a sacrifice to expiate sin! Now, though this scripture be very fruitful in practical observations, yet it is not my purpose, at this time, to note or prosecute any of them except this one, which rises from the prefatory particle, or that note of admiration, with which John's testimony of Christ is ushered in: *Behold the Lamb of God!* And the note thence will be this:

Doct. *That Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is to be beheld with admiration and affection suitable to such an object.*

Christ is beheld by men three ways:

First, Carnally with an eye of flesh: so men saw him in the days of his flesh, and despised him, Isa. liii. 2. Carnal eyes saw no beauty in him, that he should be desired.

Secondly, Fiducially, by the eye of faith: believing, is seeing Christ, John vi. 40. Faith is to the saints instead of eyes: By it they make Christ present, though the heavens have received him out of our carnal sight.

Thirdly, Beatifically, by the glorified eye: so *the spirits of just men made perfect* do, by their mental eye, see him in glory; and all

the saints, after the resurrection, shall with these corporeal eyes, see their Redeemer, according to Job xix. 26, 27.

The sight of Christ by faith (which is all the sight of him that any man now hath, or can have in this world) as it is much more excellent than the first; for "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believe," John xx. 29. so it is much inferior to the last; 1 Cor. xiii. 12. "For now we see darkly through a glass, but then "face to face" But though it be an inferior vision in respect of that which is immediate and perfect; yet the eye of faith is a precious eye, and the visions of Christ by faith, are ravishing visions: and he that beholds Christ, the *Lamb of God*, by a steady fixed eye of faith, cannot but admire, and be deeply affected with such a sight of him. The views of Christ by faith, are ravishing and transporting views, 1 Pet. i. 8. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

It is a disparagement to so glorious an object as Christ, to behold him, and not wonder; to see, and not love him. Certainly the admiration, love, delight, and joy of our hearts, are all at the command of faith: for let us but consider what ravishing excellencies are in Christ, for the eye of the believer to behold and admire.

First, God is in Christ, 2 Cor. v. 19. He is *God manifested in the flesh*, 1 Tim. iii. 16. A God incarnate is the world's wonder! Here is finite and infinite joined in one; eternity matched with time; the Creator and creature making but one person! "The Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth; A woman shall compass a man," Jer. xxxi. 22. It is an argument of weakness to admire little things; and of stupidity, not to admire great things. 'Many miracles (saith one) were wrought by Christ in the flesh; but the greatest of all miracles was his assumption of flesh.'

Secondly, The wisdom of God is in Christ; yea, *in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, Col. ii. 3. Never did the divine wisdom display its glorious beams in the eyes of men and angels, in any work of God since the beginning of time, as it hath done in the designation of Christ to be the Lamb of God, a sacrifice for sin. *Behold the Lamb of God!* and in him behold the unsearchable wisdom of God, in recovering the elect perfectly from all the danger of sin, and yet making sin more dreadful to them, by way of their recovery from it, than ever it could be made by any other consideration.

Infinite wisdom, in suiting the sinner's remedy to the cause of his disease! The disease was the pride of man; the remedy was the humiliation of the Son of God. Man affected to be as God; that ruined him: God comes down, assumes flesh, and will be found in fashion as a man; that saved him.

O profound wisdom! which from the loss and ruin of our primitive glory (which was the undoing of us, soul and body) takes the

occasion of raising us to a far better state, and settles us in it with a much better security than the former.

Who but Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, as he is called, 1 Cor. i. 24. could ever have ordered and over-ruled the worst of evils, so as by occasion of the breach of the law, to raise more glory to God, than ever could have been given to him by the most punctual observation of its commands, or by the most rigorous execution of its penalties? O the astonishing depth of wisdom!

Thirdly, The love of God is in Christ. *Behold the Lamb of God!* and in him behold the love of God, in the highest and most triumphant discovery that ever was, or can be made of it in this world! 1 John iv. 10. 'Herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' O here, here is the love of God to sinners! he manifests love to us, in our daily provisions, protections, deliverances, and comforts. That we have health when others groan under pains: therein is love: that we have bread to eat, when others are ready to perish; therein is love. O! but to have Christ to be a propitiation for us, when the angels that fell were left desperate; therein was love indeed! All the love that breaks out in the variety of providences for us in this world, in our healths and estates, in our relations and comforts, is nothing compared with this love: Herein is love indeed!

Fourthly, The tender mercies of God over poor sinners are in Christ. As Christ is the mercy promised, Luke i. 72. the capital mercy; so he is the channel, through which all the streams of God's mercy flow freely to the sons of men, Jude 21. The mercy of God to eternal life, or his saving mercies, are only dispensed to us through Jesus Christ. *Behold the Lamb of God!* a Lamb prepared by the astonishing mercy of God, a sacrifice for us, when no sacrifice was laid out for fallen angels. Mercy alone hath made this difference: mercy opened its tender eye, and looked through Christ upon us, in the depth of our misery: in Christ it is that the milder attribute of mercy is exercised upon us, whilst severe justice punishes them.

Fifthly, All the hopes of poor sinners are in Christ, Col. i. 27. Take away Christ, and where is the hope of our souls? Tim. i. 1. it is by the *blood of the Lamb* that we have hope towards God: in his oblation, and no where else, our hope of salvation finds footing: on him it is the anchor of hope is fixed, and the soul stayed, when the storms of fear and inward trouble do arise, and beat violently upon it.

Sixthly, The salvation of our souls to eternity, is in Christ; Acts i. 12. 'Neither is there any other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.' He is the ark, in whom we are preserved, Jude ver. 1. Look, as the sprinkling of the blood of the Paschal Lamb upon the door-posts of the Israelites, was that which preserved them from the destroying angel; so the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, typified by that blood, saves believers from the wrath to come.

But who can open the unsearchable riches, or recount the ravishing excellencies found in Christ? Angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, behold, and admire for evermore, the incomparable excellencies of Christ! Heaven would be no heaven to them, if they could not behold Christ there, Psal. lxxiii. 25.

But my business rather lies in improving this point, than endeavouring farther to unfold it: for new wonders will appear in Christ, if we behold him to eternity.

Use. And all the improvement I shall make of it, shall be in one use of exhortation; beseeching every one of you, whatever your present condition and estate may be, ‘to behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world:’ And,

First, If there be found among you any that are sensible of a stony hard heart, which cannot relent and mourn for all the wrong done to Jesus Christ, by sin, whose affections are benumbed and stupified by sin, so that no considerations they can urge upon their own hearts, are able to thaw them, and cause a relenting pang for sin; to such I would direct the words of this text, as the most effectual means to melt such hearts. Look hither, hard heart; ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ Consider, believe, and apply what is here sensibly represented; and thy heart is hard indeed, if it relent not upon such a view of Christ. It is said, Zech. xii. 10. ‘They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced, and mourn.’ Behold the Son of God, brought ‘as a Lamb to the slaughter’ for thee, a vile, polluted sinner! Behold the invaluable blood of this sacrifice, shed for thee! Bring thy thoughts close to this subject; think who it is that was made *a Lamb for sacrifice*; for whom he endured all his unspeakable sufferings; how meekly and willingly he endured all the wrath of God and men, standing in his perfect innocency, to be slain for thee. Behold! he was ‘made sin for thee, who had no sin; that thou, who hadst no righteousness, mightest be made the righteousness of God in him.’ Oh! whoever loved thee at that rate Christ hath done? Who would endure that misery that Christ did endure for thy sake? Would thy father, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, that is as thy own soul, be content to feel that for thee, (though but one hour) which Christ felt, when ‘his sweat was as it had been great drops of blood falling down to the ground?’ Nay, thou wouldst never taste such a cup for the saving of thine own child, as Christ drank off, when he cried, ‘My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?’ Behold how he loved thee!

Surely, if the rocks rent asunder at his passion, thy heart is harder than a rock, if it thaw not at such a sight as this. Fix thine eyes a while here, and thine eye will affect thine heart.

Secondly, Is there any among us that make too light of sin, and are easily overcome by every temptation to the commission of it? O come hither, and ‘behold the Lamb of God!’ and you cannot possibly have slight thoughts of sin after such a sight of Christ. See here the

price of sin ! behold what it cost the Lord Jesus Christ to expiate it. Did he come into the world as a Lamb, bound with the bands of an irreversible decree, to die for sin ? Did he come from the bosom of the Father, to be our ransom, and that at the price of his own life ? Did the hand of severe justice shed the heart-blood of this immaculate Lamb, to satisfy for the wrongs thy sins have done to God ? And yet, canst thou look upon sin as a light matter ! God forbid !

I remember, when the worthies of Israel brake through the host of the Philistines, and brought unto David the waters of the well of Bethlehem, it is said, 2 Sam. xxiii. 17. ‘He would not drink thereof, but poured it out before the Lord, and said, Be it far from me, that I should do this : Is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives ?’

He longed for it, and yet would not taste it, how pleasant soever it would have been to him, considering what hazard was run to obtain it.

Ah Christian ! it was but the hazard of their blood that gave check to David’s appetite to the water : And if the water had cost an equal quantity of their blood, yet it had been but a low argument to dissuade him from drinking it, to this consideration that now lies before thee. Thy sin actually cost the blood of Christ ; one drop whereof is more valuable than all human blood ; and yet wilt thou not deny thy lusts, nor resist a temptation for his sake ? ‘Behold the Lamb of God, slain for thy sin !’ and thou canst never have slight thoughts of it any more.

Thirdly, Is there any among you that droop, and are discouraged in their spirits, because of their manifold aggravated iniquities ; who being overweighed with the burthensome sense of sin, despond and sink in their minds ? To such I would apply the words of my text, as a sovereign cordial, to revive their hearts and hopes : ‘Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world !’

If the blood of the Lamb can take away the sin of the world, it can take away thy sin, though there be a world of sin in thee. For do but consider Christ, as designed from eternity to be our propitiation ; John vii. 27. ‘Him hath God the Father sealed ;’ as sacrificed in our room, ‘in the fulness of time.’ 1 Cor. v. 7. ‘Christ our passover is sacrificed for us :’ As accepted by the Father with the greatest content and pleasure, even ‘as a sweet smelling savour ;’ Eph. v. 2. As publicly justified and discharged by God, the Creditor, at his resurrection, 1 Tim. iii. 16. and John xvi. 9. And lastly, Consider him as now in heaven, where he ‘appears before God for us, as a Lamb that had been slain,’ Rev. v. 6. bearing the very marks of his death, and presenting them before God, as the most effectual and moving plea, to procure pardon, and mercy for his people. Let these things, I say, be duly pondered, and nothing will be found more effectual to relieve the despondent minds of poor believers against the sinking sense of their sin.

He that represents himself in the sacrament as wounded for you, shews at the same time, to the Father in heaven, the real body that was wounded; than which nothing more effectually moves mercy, or stays the sliding feet of a poor believer's hope: And that whether we consider,

First, The dignity of that body which was wounded; the most hallowed and deeply sanctified thing that ever was created; Luke i. 35. 'That holy thing.'

Secondly, Or his vicegerency in suffering; 'He was wounded for our transgressions,' Isa. liii. 5. It was for that hard, proud, vain, dead heart, that thou complainest of. Or,

Thirdly, The end and design of those wounds; which was to repair the honour of God, and the violated law: the language of that blood (which is said to 'speak better things than the blood of Abel,' Heb. xii. 24.) is this:

'Father, have these poor souls wounded thy name, thine honour, thy law? Behold the wounds thy justice hath inflicted on me, for reparation of all that wrong they have done thee!' O how sweetly doth the blood of the Lamb settle the conscience of a poor drooping believer!

Fourthly, Is there any among you that are faint-hearted, and ready to shrink away from any sufferings for Christ, as unable to bear and endure any thing for his sake? To such I would say in the words of this text, *Behold the Lamb of God!* Did Christ suffer such grievous things for you! and cannot you suffer small matters for him? Alas! what is the wrath of man to the *wrath of the great and terrible God?* Besides, he was an innocent Lamb, and deserved not to suffer the least degree of penal evil upon his own account; but thou hast deserved hell, and yet shrinkest under the sufferings of a moment. Did he suffer so much for you; and can you suffer nothing for him? Surely he, in suffering for you, hath 'left you an example, that you should follow his steps,' 1 Pet. ii. 21. What! is our blood compared in dignity to the blood of Christ? What! are our sufferings compared in kind, or degree, to the sufferings of Christ! Nothing is found to fortify a man's spirit for sufferings, as the meditation of Christ's suffering for us doth.

Fifthly, Is there any among you that are impatient under your own personal trials and troubles, apt to howl under common afflictions from the hand of God, or swell with revenge under injuries from the hands of men! To such I would say, *Behold the Lamb of God!* Was Christ a Lamb for meekness, and art thou a lion for fierceness? Was he silent, not once opening his mouth, when he suffered most vile things from the hands of sinners, and can you bear nothing? He suffered patiently, and deserved it not; you suffer impatiently, and have deserved infinitely more.

O that you would learn to be more Christ-like in all your trials and afflictions! let it not be said, that Christ carried it as a Lamb when

he was tried, and we like swine, grumbling or howling when we are tried. O get a Christ-like temper !

Sixthly, Is there any among you that stagger at the promises, through unbelief, that cannot rely upon a word of promise, because their own unbelieving hearts fill them with unworthy suspicions of the power, faithfulness, or willingness of God to perform them to them? O that such would *behold the Lamb of God*, as represented in this ordinance ! Are not all the promises of God sealed to believers in the blood of the Lamb ? Heb. ix. 17, 18, 19, 20. Are not all the promises of God, in Christ, ‘Yea, and Amen, to all that are in him?’ 2 Cor. i. 20. Or is there any thing put into any promise of greater value than the blood of the Lamb, that was shed to purchase it? Or is not the giving of Christ to die for us the accomplishment of the greatest promise that ever God made to us? And after the fulfilling thereof, what ground remains for any to doubt the fulfilling of lesser promises?

Lastly, Is there any among you that desire to get up your affections at this table, to have your hearts in a melting temper, to awaken and rouse up all the powers of your souls in so great an occasion for it as this? *Behold the Lamb of God!* and this will do it.

Christ calls off your eyes and thoughts from all other objects to himself; Isa. lxx. 11. ‘I said, Behold me ! behold me !’ Fix the eye of faith here, and you will feel a pang quickly coming upon your hearts like that, Cant. ii. 5. “Stay me with flaggons, comfort me with apples; I am sick with love.” Your eyes will affect your hearts; whilst you behold, your hearts will melt within you.



THE SIXTH

MEDITATION,

UPON ROM. viii. 32.

*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all ;
how shall he not with him freely give us all things.*

THIS scripture contains a most weighty argument to encourage and confirm the faith of Christians in the expectation of all spiritual and temporal mercies. It proceeds from the greater to the less affirmatively: he that delivered his Son for us, what can he deny us after such a gift? Every word hath its weight.

Did not God spare (i. e. abate) any thing which his justice could inflict upon his Son, his own Son, opposed here to his adopted sons, as being infinitely more excellent than they, and most dear to him above and beyond all others? but, on the contrary, delivered him up, how dear soever he was unto him, to humiliation, contradiction of sinners, to all sorrows and temptations, yea, to death, and that of the cross, and all this *for us, for us sinners, for us enemies to God, for us unlovely wretches*; “How shall he not with him freely give us all things?” How is it imaginable that God should withhold, after this, spirituals or temporals, from his people? How shall he not call them effectually, justify them freely, sanctify them thoroughly, and glorify them eternally? How shall he not clothe them, feed them, protect and deliver them?

Surely if he would not spare or abate to his own Son one stroke, one tear, one groan, one sigh, one circumstance of misery, it can never be imagined that ever he should, after this, deny or withhold from his people, for whose sakes all this was suffered, any mercies, any comforts, any privilege, spiritual or temporal, which is good for them, and needful to them. So that in the words we find, 1. A proposition. 2. An inference from it.

The proposition opens the severity of God’s justice to Christ; the inference declares the riches of his mercy to us in Christ.

1. We have here before us a proposition, containing the severity of divine justice towards Christ; and this is expressed two ways, viz.

1st, Negatively, he spared him not.

2dly, Affirmatively, he delivered him up for us.

1st, Negatively; *He spared not his own Son*. There is a threefold mercy of God, viz. Preventing mercy, which steps betwixt us and trouble: delivering mercy, which takes us out of the hand of trouble: and sparing mercy, which though it do not prevent nor deliver, yet it mitigates, allays, and graciously moderates our troubles; and though sparing mercy be desirable and sweet, yet it is the least and lowest sort of mercy that God exercises towards any. Though it be mercy to have the time of sufferings shortened, or one degree of suffering abated, yet these are the lowest and least effects of mercy; and yet these were denied Jesus Christ, when he stood in our room to satisfy for us: God spared not one drop, he abated not one degree of that wrath which Christ was to suffer for us.

2dly, Affirmatively; but on the contrary, *He delivered him up for us all*.

He delivered him, as a judge by sentence of law delivers up the prisoner to be executed. It is true Pilate delivered him up to be crucified, and he also gave himself for us: but betwixt God’s delivering, Pilate’s delivering, and his own, there is this difference to be observed; in God it was an act of highest justice; in Pilate an act of greatest wickedness; in himself, an act of wonderful obedience.

God, as by an act of highest justice, delivered him up *for us*. For

us, notes the vicegerency of his sufferings, not only for our good, as the final cause ; nor only for our sins, as the meritorious cause ; but for us, (i. e.) in our room, place, or stead according to 1 Pet. iii. 18. and 2 Cor. v. 14.

2. We have also here before us a most sweet and comfortable inference and conclusion from this proposition: If God have so delivered him, *how shall he not with him, freely give us all things?* For Christ comprehends all other mercies in himself ; therefore in giving him *for us*, all other mercies are necessarily with him given *to us*.

And these mercies the poorest, weakest believer in the world may warrantably expect from God ; for as God delivered him *for us all*, so the treasures of all spiritual and temporal mercies are thereby freely opened to us all, to the weak, as well as to the strong.

He saith not, Christ was delivered for all absolutely, but *for us all* ; i. e. all that believe, all that are elected and called ; in whose person it is manifest the apostle here speaks, as Paræus on the place well observes. Hence these two doctrinal conclusions fairly offer themselves.

Doct. 1. *That the rigour and severity of divine justice was executed upon Jesus Christ, when he suffered for us.*

Doct. 2. *That believers may strongly infer the greatest of mercies to themselves, from the severity of God's justice to Jesus Christ.*

I would willingly speak to both these points at this time, each affording such proper matter of meditation to us in such a season as this. To begin therefore with the first observation.

Doct. 1. *That the rigour and severity of divine justice was executed upon Jesus Christ, when he suffered for us ; God did not spare him.*

In Zech. xiii. 7. you have God's commission given to the sword of justice, to smite his own Son, and that without pity ; "Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow ; smite the Shepherd," &c. And when this commission came to be executed upon Christ, the text tells us, *God did not spare him* ; all the vials of his wrath were poured out to the last drop.

Two things require our attention in this point : 1. Wherein the severity of justice to Christ appeared. 2. Why must justice be executed on him in such rigour and severity ? Why there could be no abatement, mitigation, or sparing mercy shewn him in that day ?

1. Wherein the severity of divine justice to Christ appeared ? And this will manifest itself in the consideration of the following particulars.

First, Let us consider what Jesus Christ suffered, and we shall see the severity of justice in his sufferings, for he suffered all kinds of miseries, and that in the most intense degree of them : His sufferings were from all hands, from heaven, earth, and hell ; from his enemies, who condemned him, buffeted him, reviled him, scourged, and crucified him ; from his own disciples and followers, one of whom perfidiously be-

trayed him, another openly denied him, and all in the hour of his greatest trouble forsook and abandoned him.

He suffered in his body the most exquisite torments: the cross was a cruel engine of torment, and more so to him than any other, by reason of the excellent *crasis* and *temperament* of his body, and his most acute and delicate sense, for, as the schoolmen truly say, he was *optime complexionatus*, of the most exact and exquisite complexion; and his senses remained acute and vigorous, no way blunted, during the whole time of his sufferings, but full of life and sense to the last gasp, as may be gathered from Mark xv. 39. "When the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God."

He suffered in his soul; yea, the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings; he felt in his inner man the exquisite torments and inexpressible anguish of the wrath of God. Hence was that preternatural bloody sweat in the garden, and hence that heart-rending outcry upon the cross, *My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?*

In all which sufferings from heaven, from earth, from hell, from friends, from enemies, there was no allay or abatement of the least degree of misery. "God spared not his own Son, (saith the text) but delivered him up." Wherein the severity of divine justice to Jesus Christ, is displayed in these five remarkable considerations following.

First, God spared not. If mercy, pity, and forbearance might be expected from any hand, surely it might be God; he is the fountain of mercy; "That the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," saith the apostle, James v. 11. The most melting and tender compassions of a mother to her sucking child, are but cruelty in comparison with divine tenderness and mercy; Isa. xlix. 15. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb! Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."

Can a woman, the more affectionate sex, forget her sucking child, her own child, (and not a nurse child) her only child, whilst it hangs on her breast, and, with the milk from her breast, draws love from her heart? Can such a thing as this be in nature! Possibly it may; some such cruel mothers may be found, but *yet I will not forget thee*, saith God. Though human corrupt nature may be so vitiated, yet from the divine nature, compassion and mercy are inseparable; it flows as waters flow from their fountain, only here it restrained itself, and let not out one drop to Jesus Christ, in the day of his sufferings: God, the God of mercy, spared not.

Secondly, God spared not, saith the text; i. e. he abated not any thing which justice could inflict. Christ was not spared one stroke, one tear, one groan, one drop, one sigh, one shame, one circum-

stance; no, not the least which justice could demand as satisfaction for man's sin.

There be divers kinds of mercy in God; there is in him preventing mercy, delivering mercy, and sparing mercy. Now sparing mercy, (as Mr. Caryl on Job well observes) is the lowest mercy of all the three; it is less mercy to be spared or abated some degree or circumstance of misery, than to have misery prevented by mercy's stepping in betwixt us and it: it is less also than to be wholly delivered out of the hand of misery: Either of these are greater acts of mercy, than to abate a degree, or shorten an hour of our trouble; the least abatement of any one circumstance of misery had been sparing mercy, though it had been but the least and lowest act of mercy; and yet even this was denied to Christ; he was not abated one minute of time, or the least degree of sorrow. God spared not.

Thirdly, He spared not his own Son, *τὸν ἰδίον*. So stiled *signanter*, his own, or his proper Son, in a special and peculiar manner, nearer and dearer to him than the angels, who are his sons by creation, Job i. 6. or any of the saints, who are his sons by grace, in the way of regeneration and adoption, John i. 12, 13. 'This was his own Son by nature, a Son of an higher rank and order, Psal. ii. 7. begotten in an ineffable manner, from all eternity, in his own divine essence; and so is his Son by nature, having the same essence and nature with the Father, being co-equal, co-essential, and co-eternal with the Father.

No relation in nature is so intimate, strict and dear as this: our children, are not so much our own children, our bodies are not so much our own bodies, as Christ was God's own Son; and yet, though he were so dear to him, his other self, his express image, his own dear Son, *He spared him not: God spared not his own Son.*

Fourthly, And that which makes a further discovery of divine severity towards Jesus Christ, is this, that God spared not his own Son in the day of his greatest distress, when he cried to his Father in an agony, that if it were possible the cup might pass from him: For of that day, this scripture is mainly to be understood, the day when he fell to the ground and prayed, "That if it were possible the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee, take away this cup from me," Mark xiv. 35, 36. He beheld his own dear Son sweltering under the heaviest pressure of his wrath, sweating great drops of blood, crying, "If it be possible, let this hour, let this cup pass;" and yet it could not be granted. O the severity of God! he heard the cry of Ahab, and spared him; he heard the Ninevites cry, and spared them; he heard the cries of Hagar and Ishmael, and spared them; yea, he hears the young ravens when they cry, and feeds them; but, when his Son cried with the most vehement cry, that the cup might pass, he cannot be excused, he must drink it up, even the very dregs of the cup of trembling, and that to the last drop. O the justice and severity of God!

Fifthly, and lastly, Consider what the Father of mercies did instead of sparing the Son of his love, and the text will inform you that ‘he delivered him up for us all.’ So it is noted in Acts ii. 23. ‘Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.

There was a concession or permission to those wicked instruments that shed his blood, a loosing of the chain to those bandogs that compassed him about; such a concession as never was given them before; for till then they were tied up from perpetrating their wickedness; but now the restraints of Providence are taken away, and he is delivered unto their will; his own Father delivers him into the hands of cruelty. And thus you see wherein the severity of divine justice to Christ was manifest.

In the last place, let us see the ground and reason of this rigour and severity to Christ. Now, there are, among others, three special reasons why Christ could not be spared.

The honour of divine justice required, that he should suffer the utmost degree of punishment. It was meet that the rights of heaven should be vindicated to the full, and that the justice of God should have the last mite it could demand for satisfaction. And this was the special design and aim of God in the sufferings of Christ, as the apostle speaks, Rom. iii. 25, 26. It was ‘to declare his righteousness;’ and lest we should lose the emphatical word, it is doubled and repeated, ‘to declare I say, at this time his righteousness.’ And indeed herein God fully obtained his design; for never was justice so honoured before, to have such a person as the Son of God stand at its bar, and such a sum as his blood paid down at once for our discharge: so that justice triumphs as well as mercy, and one attribute is not robbed to pay another.

As it was necessary to God’s satisfaction, so it was necessary to ours also. If the Lord Jesus had not made full payment to the utmost mite, we could never have had full satisfaction in our consciences, about that deep and dear concernment of our souls, the remission of sin. Man is a guilty and a suspicious creature, and hard to be brought to an entire confidence in the pardoning mercy of God. Yea, it is impossible to persuade a convinced conscience, of the possibility of remission, except you can also prove the fulness of divine satisfaction; for conscience requires as much to satisfy it, as God doth to satisfy him. If God be satisfied, then conscience can be satisfied too, and securely rest upon that ground; but if there be any doubt of that, there is no appeasing of an anxious and jealous conscience: greatly therefore hath God consulted our peace in the severity of his justice to Jesus Christ. ‘Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,’ Heb. xiii. 20. Let the words be weighed; he is stiled the God of peace, when he brought back Christ from

the dead : it was incensed justice that put him to death, and appeased justice that brought him back from the dead ; and that which pacified God, is the only thing in the world that is able to satisfy the conscience of a sinner.

3. Therefore did God proceed with such rigour and severity with Jesus Christ, that thereby the demerit and evil of sin might be fully discovered to the world, and an everlasting caution left upon all hearts to beware of contracting new guilt. If justice had descended in a visible form, and hanged up millions of sinners in chains, it had not been such a warning as this against sin. Nay, let me say, the grievous and eternal torment that the damned suffer in hell, is not such a demonstration of the evil of sin as this is ; for those torments are much unknown to men till they feel them ; and when they begin to feel them, it is too late to be convinced or cautioned against sin then. But to see such a person as Christ exposed to the utmost severity of God's wrath for our sin, to see such things done in the green tree, may well make us cry out, " Lord, what will be done to the dry tree ? " O the infinite evil of sin ! O the inflexible severity of divine justice ! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God !

4. In a word ; hereby Jesus Christ is endeared the more to his people, by suffering such great and hard things in their place and for their sakes. The extremity of his sufferings for us, commands the strength of his affection to us.

And thus you see the reasons of all this severity to Jesus Christ. God intended the sweetest mercies for you, and therefore prepared the bitterest sufferings for Christ : from his deep sufferings you may confidently conclude the best of mercies are designed for you ; as you will hear in the prosecuting of the second doctrine, which, for dispatch, I purpose to handle as one use of this point now before me.

O the admirable and astonishing love of God to us poor worms of the earth, to deliver up his own Son into the hands of his enemies, that thirsted for his blood ! Long had they been restrained from satisfying their wickedness, and executing their malice, till now ; and this was the hour which he often spake of, ' My hour is not yet come.' But, oh ! what a dismal hour was it when it did come, when Providence let loose both devils and men upon Christ, delivered him over to the will of his enemies ! And this was not all ; Christ was not only delivered up into the hands of the worst of men, but, which was much more terrible, into the severe hands of divine justice, to grapple with the pure, unmixed, and unallayed wrath of the great and terrible God.

Lastly, We will improve this point by a double use, by way of information and exhortation.

Use 1. Of information.

First, The severity of God's justice to Jesus Christ informs us what a dreadful evil sin is, which so incenses the wrath of God even

against his own Son, when he bare our sins, and stood before the bar of God as our surety.

Come hither hard hearts (hard indeed if this cannot break them ;) you complain, you cannot see the evil of sin, so as to be deeply humbled for it : fix your eyes a while here, and intently consider the point in hand : suppose you saw a tender and pitiful father come into open court with fury in his face, to charge his own, his only, and his most beloved Son, and to prosecute him to death, and nothing able to satisfy him but his blood, and be well pleased when he sees it shed ; would you not say, Oh ! what horrid evil hath he done ! It must be some deep wrong, some heinous crime that he is guilty of, else it could never be that his own father could forget his bowels of pity and mercy. Yet thus did the wrath of God break forth against his dear Son, when he stood before the bar, as our surety, charged with the guilt of our sins.

Secondly, Learn hence what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God. Well might Luther cry out, *Nolo Deum absolutum, Let me have nothing to do with an absolute God.* Wo to them that stand before God in their own persons, without Christ, how will justice handle them ! ‘ For if these things were done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry tree ? ’ Luke xxiii. 31. Did the Son of God fear, tremble, sweat clots of blood ? Did he stand amazed, and fall into such an agony of soul when he drank that cup, which he knew in a few hours he should drink up, and then never taste the bitterness of it more ? How sad is their case that must drink of that cup for ever, a cup that hath eternity to the bottom !

Thirdly, How incomprehensible and ravishing is the love of God to men, that would rather be so severe to Jesus Christ, the darling of his soul, than make us the objects of his wrath for ever ? Which of you (though there be infinitely less tenderness in your hearts than God’s) would lay your hands upon a child, the worst child you have, and put him to death for the sake of the best friend you have in the world ? but God with his own hand delivered his Son, his only Son, that from everlasting was the delight of his soul, who never offended him, to death, the most cursed and cruel death, and all this for enemies : how unspeakable is this love, and past finding out !

Fourthly, Did not God spare his own Son ? then let none of us spare our own sins. Sin was that sword which pierced Christ : O let sorrow for sin pierce your hearts ! If you spare sin, God will not spare you, Deut. xxix. 20. We spare sin when we faintly oppose it, when we excuse, cover and defend it, when we are impatient under just rebukes and reproofs for it ; but all kindness to sin is cruelty to our own souls.

Fifthly, and lastly, If God did not spare Christ, certainly he intends to spare believers for his sake.

The surety could not be spared, that the principal might be spared for ever. If God had spared him, he could not have spared us ; if

he afflicts his people, it is not for satisfaction to himself, but profit to us, Heb. xii. 10. Should God spare the rod of affliction, it would not be for our advantage; so many sanctified afflictions as are spared or abated, so many mercies and spiritual advantages are withheld from us. But as for those strokes of justice that are the effects of God's vindictive wrath, they shall never be felt by believers for ever. All the wrath, all the curse, all the gall and wormwood was squeezed into Christ's cup, and not one drop left to imbitter ours.

Use 2. Of Exhortation.

Did not God spare his own Son, but give him up to the death for us all! Then possess your hearts fully in the assurance of this great truth, *That the greatest and best of mercies shall not be denied or withheld from you, if you be in Christ*; lay it down as a sure conclusion of faith, and build up your hope and comfort upon it. This takes in the second observation; and surely never was any truth better fortified, never any inference more strongly inferred. Henceforth ye may infer temporal, spiritual, and eternal mercies; all must be yours, if you be Christ's, 1 Cor. iii. 21, 22, 23. O, make sure that Christ is yours, and never hesitate at any other mercy! For,

First, God hath certainly a value and esteem for his own Son infinitely above all other things: he is his own Son, his dear Son, Col. i. 13. the *Beloved*, Eph. i. 6. the *delight of his soul*, Isa. xlii. 1. Nothing is valued by God at that rate that Christ is valued. If therefore he spare not the most excellent mercy, but parts with the very darling of his soul for us, how shall he deny, or withhold, any lesser inferior mercy? It is not to be imagined, for he is *the mercy*, emphatically so called, Luke i. 72.

Secondly, Jesus Christ is a comprehensive mercy, including all other mercies in himself; he is the tree of life, all other mercies are but the fruits growing on him; he is the *sun of righteousness*; and whatever comfort, spiritual or natural, refreshes your souls or bodies, is but a beam from that sun, a stream from that fountain. If then God part with Christ to you, and for you, he will not withhold other mercies; he will not give the whole tree, and deny an apple; bestow the fountain itself, and deny you the streams. All spiritual mercies are in him, and given with him; Eph. i. 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings, in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." All temporals are in him, and given with him, Matth. vi. 33. they are additional to that great mercy.

Thirdly, If God spared not Christ, the best mercy, but delivered him up for us all when we were his enemies, then certainly he will not deny lesser mercies when we are reconciled and made friends to him. And this is the forcible reason of the apostle, which even compels assent; Rom. v. 9. "Much more, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." In a word,

Fourthly, and lastly, If it were the very design and intention of God in not sparing his own Son, to open thereby a door for all mercies to be let in upon us, then it is not imaginable he should withhold them: he will not lose his design, nor lay so many stripes upon Christ in vain: some shall surely have the benefit of it, and none so capable as believers.

When God spared not his own Son, this was the design of it; and could you know the thoughts of his heart, they would appear to be such as these:

I will now manifest the fierceness of my heart to Christ, and the fulness of my love to believers. The pain shall be his, that the ease and rest may be theirs; the stripes his, and the healing balm issuing from them, theirs; the condemnation his, and the justification theirs; the reproach and shame his, and the honour and glory theirs; the curse his, and the blessing theirs; the death his, and the life theirs; the vinegar and gall his, the sweet of it theirs. He shall groan, and they shall triumph; he shall mourn, that they may rejoice; his heart shall be heavy for a time, that theirs may be light and glad for ever; he shall be forsaken, that they may never be forsaken; out of the worst of miseries to him, shall spring the sweetest of mercies to them. O grace! grace beyond conception of the largest mind, the expression of the tongues of angels!

THE SEVENTH MEDITATION,

UPON MARK ix. 24.

And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

THE occasion of these words is to be gathered from the context: and briefly it was this: A tender father brings a possessed child to Christ to be cured; with *Si potes?* a doubting question, "If thou canst do any thing? have compassion upon us, and help us." Words importing much natural affection and tender love to his child; "Have compassion [upon us,] and [help us.]" If the child be sick, the parent is not well; what touches the child, is felt by his father.

And as they import his natural affection to his child, so also his own spiritual disease, or the weakness of his faith. His child was

possessed with a dumb devil, and himself with unbelieving doubts and suspicions of Christ's ability to cure his child. The child had a sick body, and the father an infirm soul: Satan afflicted one by a possession, and the other by temptation, ver. 22.

Christ returns his doubtful language upon himself, ver. 23. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth:" q. d. Dost thou doubt of my ability to heal thy child? Question rather thy own ability to believe, for his cure. If he be not healed, the cause will not be in my inability, but in thine own infidelity: Which he speaks not, to insinuate that faith was in his own power, but to convince him of his weakness, and drive him to God for assistance: Which effect it obtained: for immediately he cried out, and said with tears, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

O how good it is for men to be brought into the straits of affliction sometimes! Had not this man fallen into this distress, it is not like that he had (at least not so soon) arrived either to the sense of his grace, or the weakness of it.

In the words we may note these three parts.

First, A profession of his faith; *Lord, I believe.*

Secondly, A sense of the weakness of his faith; *Help thou mine unbelief.*

Thirdly, The affection with which both were uttered; *He cried out and said with tears.* If these tears proceeded from the sense and feeling of divine power, enabling him to believe, as some think, then they were tears of joy, and would inform us of this great truth:

Doct. 1. *That the least and lowest measure of true faith, is matter of joy unspeakable to the possessor of it.*

If they proceeded from the sense of the weakness of his faith, they gave us this note:

Doct. 2. *That the remainders of unbelief in the people of God, do cost them many tears: They are the burdens and sorrows of gracious souls.*

Doct. 1. *That the least and lowest measure of true faith, is matter of joy unspeakable to the possessor of it.*

The apostle, in 2 Pet. i. 1. calls it *precious faith*; and it well deserves that epithet; for the least and lowest degree of saving faith, is of invaluable excellency; as will appear in these particulars:

First, The least degree of saving faith, truly unites the soul to Jesus Christ, and makes it as really a branch and member of him, as Moses, Abraham, or Paul were.

All saving faith receives Christ, John i. 12. Indeed, the strong believer receives him with a stronger and steadier hand than the weak one doth, who staggers, doubts, and trembles, but yet receives him; and consequently is as much interested in the blessed privileges flowing from union, as the greatest believer in the world. Such is Christ's complacency in our persons and duties, his sympathy with us in our troubles and afflictions, and our interest in his person and purchase. And is not this matter of exceeding joy? Is it not enough to melt,

yea, overwhelm the heart of a poor sinner, to discover and feel that in his own heart, which entitles him to such mercies?

Secondly, From the least degree of saving faith, we may infer as plenary a remission of sin, as from the strongest. The weakest believer is as completely pardoned, as the strongest; Acts x. 43. 'By him all that believe are justified from all things.' *All that believe*, without difference of sizes, strength, or degrees; the least as well as the greatest; the believer of a day old, as well as the fathers and worthies of greatest name, and longest standing.

Lo then, the least measure of faith entitles thee as really to the greatest blessing, as the highest acts of faith can do. It is true, the stronger the acting of faith is, the clearer the evidence usually is: but interest in the privilege is the same in both. If then thou canst discern but the weakest act and smallest measure of faith in thy soul, hast thou not reason, with him in the text, to cry out, and say with tears, *Lord, I believe?* Canst thou receive and read this pardon, the pardon of such, and so many sins, and not wet it with thy tears? O, it is matter of joy unspeakable!

Thirdly, The least degree of saving faith infers thy election of God; and if that be not matter of melting and transporting consideration, nothing is. O, it is matter of more joy, that our names *are written in the book of life*, than that the devils are subject to us, Luke x. 20. From hence it may be inferred, that we are chosen of God; Acts xiii. 48. 'As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.'

Fourthly, The least measure of saving faith, is a mercy greater than most men ever partake of.

It is true, God is rich and bountiful in the gifts of providence to others; they have the good things of this life, many of them more than their hearts can wish, Psal. lxxiii. 7. He enricheth many of them also with endowments of the mind, natural and moral knowledge and wisdom; yea, and adorns them with homilistical virtues, that render them very desirable and lovely in their converses with men; but there are but few to whom he gives saving faith, Isa. liii. 1. Believers are but a small remnant among men.

Fifthly, and *lastly*, He that hath any, the least degree of saving faith, hath that which will never be taken from him: All other excellencies go away at death, Job iv. 21. but this is a spring that never fails, 'it springs up into everlasting life,' John iv. 14. A man may outlive his friends and familiars, his estate and health, his gifts and natural parts, but not his faith. How great matter of joy and comfort is wrapt up in the least degree of faith!

Use 1. Of trial.

It concerns us then to examine ourselves, whether our faith be true, be it more or less, stronger or weaker; and, until we discern its truth, it will yield but little comfort.

I confess, weak believers are under great disadvantages as to comfort; small and weak things being usually very inevident and undiscernible. But yet, in this example before us, we find weak faith was made evident, though much unbelief was mixed with it. *Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.* In which words, many very useful signs of true, though weak, faith did appear; and they are very relieving to weak believers, to consider them. O that we might find the like in us!

First, His faith gave him a tender, melting heart. *He cried out, and said with tears.* Doth your faith melt your hearts, either in a sense of your own vileness, or the riches of free grace to such vile creatures?

Secondly, His faith gave him a deep sense of his remaining unbelief, and burdened his heart with it: *Help my unbelief.* And sure so will yours, if it be but as a grain of mustard-seed in you.

Thirdly, His weak faith carried him to Christ, in fervent prayers and cries, for his help to subdue unbelief in him; and so will yours, if your faith be right. O how often do the people of God go to the throne of grace upon that errand! Help, Lord, my heart is dead, vain, and very unbelieving; there is no dealing with it in my own strength: Father, help me!

Fourthly, His weak faith made him hunger and thirst after greater measures of it: *Help my unbelief;* i. e. Lord, cure it, that I may believe with more strong and steady acts of faith; that I may not question thy power any more, or say, *If thou canst do any thing?* Why thus it will be with you, if you be true believers; Luke xvii. 5. 'Lord, (said the disciples) increase our faith.'

Fifthly, There was a conflict in his soul betwixt faith and infidelity, grace and corruption; and this is very sensible to him; faith inclining him one way, and unbelief carrying him another: And hence he speaks like a man greatly distressed, betwixt the working of contrary principles in his own soul (and so you will also find it in yourselves) Gal. v. 17. 'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.'

Use 2. Of consolation.

Well then, bless the Lord for the least degree of saving faith; and be not so discouraged at its imperfections, as to overlook and slight the smallest working of faith in your souls. This poor man was deeply sensible of his unbelief, and yet at the same instant truly thankful for a small measure of faith; and so should you, For,

First, the least measure of saving faith, is more than all the creatures power could produce: It is the *faith of the operation of God*, Col. ii. 12. It is *the work of God, that ye believe*, John vi. 29. Yea, it is the *exceeding greatness of his power*, Eph. i. 19, 20. No ministers of Christ, how excellent soever their gifts are, no duties or ordinances, no la-

bour or diligence of your own, without this mighty power of God, can ever bring you to faith.

Secondly, It is the just matter of wonder and astonishment, that ever one spark of faith was kindled in such an heart as thine is ; an heart which had no predisposition or inclination in the least to believe : Yea, it was not *Rasa Tabula*, like clean paper, void of any impression of faith, but filled with contrary impressions to it ; so that it is marvellous that ever your hearts received the stamp or impression of faith on them.

It was wonderful, that fire should fall from heaven and burn upon the altar, when Elijah had laid the wood in order upon it ; but much more when he poured so much water upon it, as not only wet all the wood, but filled the trenches, 1 Kings xviii. 33. Just so was the case of thy soul, reader, when God came to kindle faith there : Thy heart was dark and ignorant, neither acquainted with God, or thy own condition ; yea, thy heart was a proud heart, full of self-righteousness, and self-conceitedness, Rev. iii. 17. Rom. x. 3. A heart, that would rather venture eternal damnation, than deny self, and submit to Christ : And yet the light of the Lord must shine into this darkness, and the pride and stiffness of thy heart must be broken, and brought to yield, or there is no believing.

Beside, How many and mighty enemies did oppose the work of faith in thy soul ? Among which Satan and thy own carnal reasonings were the principal, 2 Cor. x. 4. By them, what strong-holds and fortifications were raised, to secure thee from the strokes of conviction that make way for faith. Let but the state of thine own heart, as it was by nature, be considered, and thou wilt say, it was the wonderful work of God, that ever thou wast brought in any degree to believe.

Thirdly, Though thy faith be weak, yet it is growing, if it be saving faith. The largest tree was once but a kernel, or acorn ; the most famous believer, at first but a weak and doubting one : Be not discouraged therefore, God will fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness in you, and the work of faith with power. It were certainly much better for you to be blessing God for a little faith, praying for the increase of faith, and diligently attending those means by which it may be improved and made flourishing in your souls, than, by a sinful, ungrateful, and prejudicial despondency, at once to dishonour God, and thus wrong yourselves.

Doct. 2. *That the remains of unbelief in gracious hearts do cost them many tears and sorrows.*

There are many things that afflict and grieve the people of God from without ; but all their outward troubles are nothing to these troubles that come from within.

There are many inward troubles that make them groan, but none more than this, the unbelief they find in their own hearts. This sin justly costs them more trouble than other sins, because it is the root

from which other sins do spring; a root of bitterness, bearing worm-wood and gall, to the imbittering of their souls. For,

First, The remains of unbelief in the saints, greatly dishonour God; and what is a great dishonour to God, cannot but be a great grief and burden to them: For look, as faith gives God special honour above all other graces, so unbelief, in a special manner, both wrongs and grieves him above all other sins. Unbelief in dominion makes God a liar, 1 John v. 10. And even the relicts thereof in believers, do shake their assent to his truths and promises, and nourish a vile suspicion of them in the heart. And how do those base jealousies reflect upon his honour? Certainly it cannot but be a grief to a gracious heart to see God dishonoured by others. Psal. cxix. 36. and a much greater to dishonour him ourselves. *Hic illac lachrymæ*: Upon this ground, we may justly cry out, and say with tears, *Lord, help our unbelief!*

Secondly, The remains of unbelief in the saints, doth not only dishonour God, but deface and spoil their best duties, in which they at any time approach unto God. Is the face of God clouded from us in prayer, hearing or receiving? Examine the cause and reason, and you will find that cloud raised from your own unbelieving hearts. Are your affections cold, flat, and dead in duty? Dig but to the root, and you will find this sin to lie there. If the word do not work upon you as you desire and pray it might, it is because it is not mingled with faith, Heb. iv. 2. No duties, nor ordinances, no promises, can give down their sweet influences upon your souls, because of this sin. Now communion with the Lord in duties is the life of our life: These things are dearer to the saints, than their eyes. Justly therefore do they bewail and mourn over that sin, which obstructs and intercepts their sweetest enjoyments in this world.

Thirdly, The remains of unbelief give advantage and success to Satan's temptations upon us. Doth he at any time affright and scare us from our duty, or draw and entice us to the commission of sin, or darken and cloud our condition, and fill us with inward fears and horror, without cause? All this he doth, by the meditation of our unbelief. The apostle, in Eph. vi. 16. calls faith the soul's shield against temptation: And 1 John v. 4. it is called *the victory by which we overcome*; i. e. the sword, or weapon, by which we achieve our victories. And if so, then unbelief disarms us both of sword and shield, and leaves us naked of defence in the day of battle, a prey to the next temptation that befalls us.

Fourthly, The remains of unbelief hinder the thriving of all graces; it is a worm at their root: a plant of such malignant quality, that nothing which is spiritual can thrive under the droppings and shadow of it. It is said, Heb. iv. 2. that the gospel was preached to the Israelites, but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. No ordinances, nor duties, be they never so excellent, will make that soul to thrive, where unbelief prevails: You pray, you hear, you fast, you meditate; and yet you do not thrive; your spi-

ritual food doth no good: You come from ordinances as dead, careless, and vain, as you went to them. And why is it thus, but because of remaining unbelief?

Use I. Let all the people of God bewail and tenderly mourn over the remainders of infidelity in their own hearts: There, there is the root of the disease. And surely, reader, thy heart is not free of such symptoms of it, as appear in other men's hearts. For do but consider,

Symp. 1. What is our impatience to wait for mercy, and despondency of spirit, if deliverance come not quickly in the outward, or inward straits of soul or body, but a plain symptom of unbelief in our hearts? "He that believes, will not make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16. He that can believe, can also wait God's time, Psalm xxvii. 14.

Symp. 2. And what means our readiness to use sinful mediums, to prevent, or extricate ourselves out of trouble, but a great deal of infidelity, lurking still in our hearts? Might but faith be heard to speak, it would say in thy heart, let me rather die ten deaths, than commit one sin. It is sweeter and easier, to die in my integrity, than to live with a defiled, or wounded conscience. It is nothing but our unbelief, that makes us so ready to put forth our hands to iniquity, when the rod of the wicked rests long upon us, or any imminent danger threatens us, Psalm cxxv. 3.

Symp. 3. Doth not the unbelief of your hearts shew itself in your deeper thoughtfulness, and great anxieties about earthly things; Mat. vi. 30. We pretend, we have trusted God with our souls to all eternity, and yet cannot trust him for our daily bread. We bring the evils of to-morrow upon us to-day; and all because we cannot believe more.

O reader! how much better were it to hear such questions as these from thee. How shall I get an heart suitable to the mercies I do enjoy? How shall I duly improve them for God? "What shall I render to the Lord, for all his goodness?" This would better become thee, than to afflict thyself with, "What shall I eat? What shall I drink? Or wherewithal shall I be clothed?"

Symp. 4. What doth the slavish fear of death speak, but remains of unbelief still in our hearts? Are there not many faintings, tremblings, despondencies of mind, under the thoughts of death? Oh! if faith were high, thy spirit could not be so low, 2 Cor. v. 1, 2, 3. The more bondage of fear, the more infidelity.

Symp. 5. To conclude; What is the voice of all those distractions of thy heart in religious duties, but want of faith, weakness in faith, and the actual prevalence of unbelief? You come to God in prayer; and there a thousand vanities beset you: Your heart is carried away: it roves, it wanders to the ends of the earth. Conscience smites for this, and saith, Thou dost but mock God: thy soul will smart for this: Thou feelest neither strength nor sweetness arising out of such duties. You enquire for remedies, and fill the ears of friends with your com-

plaints; and, it may be, see not the root of all this to be in your own unbelief. But there it is; and till that be cured, it will not be better with you.

Use II. Yet let not poor Christians so mourn, as those that have no hope, or ground of comfort, even in this case. For,

First, Though there be remains of unbelief in you, yet you have infinite cause to bless God that they are but remains. You once were in unbelief; 1 Tim. i. 13. i. e. under the full power and dominion of it. Had God cut you off in that state, you must certainly have perished. This is the disease, but that was the death of your souls.

Secondly, Though unbelief be in you, yet it is not in you *per modum quietis*, by way of rest, as it is in all unbelievers: but by way of daily conflict, and as a burden too heavy to be borne. Now though the sin be sad, yet the sorrow for it is sweet; and your conflicts with it bring you under a very comfortable sign of grace, Rom. vii. 12.

Thirdly, This is a disease, under which all Christians do labour more or less. There is not a heart so holy in all the world, but is in some degree tainted and infected with this disease. And this hath been evident, not only in all Christians, of all sizes, but in all the acts of their faith. Job's faith triumphed in chap. xiii. 15. yet had its eclipse and fainting-fit in chap. xix. 20. Abraham was a most renowned believer, a great pattern and example of faith: O how high a pitch did his faith amount to in Gen. xxii. 3. And yet there was a time when it fainted, and failed him, as at Gerar, Gen. xx. 2, 10, 11. David in Psal. xxvii. 1, 23. was not like David in 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. The faith of Peter shone out like the sun, in a glorious confession, Matth. xvi. 16. and yet was not only beclouded, but seemed to be gone down, and quite set, in Matth. xxvi. 69. though it afterwards recovered itself.

Fourthly, It is not this, or that degree of unbelief, that damns a man, but the power and dominion of it, that damns him. Indeed, your comfort depends much upon the strength of your faith; but your salvation depends upon the truth of it. Most Christians come to heaven with a weak and doubting faith; but few, with their sails filled with a direct and fresh wind of assurance.

Fifthly, There is enough in Christ to help thy unbelief; *Lord, said this poor man, help my unbelief.* He is an excellent physician, and knows how to relieve and cure thee: Go to him and groan out thy complaint; tell him, thy heart is pained and troubled with this disease; thou shalt find him a faithful, skilful, and merciful Saviour.

Sixthly, It is but a little while, before this, with all other diseases bred by it in thy soul, shall be perfectly healed; sanctification is a cure begun; glorification is a cure performed and completed: The former hath destroyed the dominion, the latter will destroy the existence of it in thy soul: When you come to heaven, and never till then, will you find yourselves well, and at ease in every part.

And thus much of the second point.

There are some general observations arising from both parts of my text considered together, viz. the thankful acknowledgment of his faith, and the sorrowful sense of his unbelief. It shall suffice, for a conclusion to this meditation, only to note them; and they are these;

First, That the deepest sense of sin must not exclude an humble and thankful acknowledgment of the grace of God in his people. It is the fault of most, to hide their sins; and the fault of some to hide their graces.

Secondly, Acceptance of our persons and duties, is a pure act of grace: There is no duty performed in a perfect act of faith; all is mixed with unbelief in some degree, the honey and the comb are mixed together, Cant. ii. 8. No duty as it comes from us is pure.

Thirdly, Justly may we suspect that faith for a false faith, which boasts of its own strength, but never mourns in the sense of unbelief. Where there are no conflicts with sin, there can be no sound evidence of sincerity.

Fourthly, Believers must not wonder to find strange vicissitudes and alterations in the state of their souls: Sometimes a clear, and sometimes a cloudy day: Sometimes they have their songs in the night, and sometimes their bitter lamentations. If you ask, why is it thus? the answer is, there are within you contrary principles struggling in your souls; and it is no wonder at all to find peace and trouble, hope and fear, light and darkness taking their turns, and sharing your time betwixt them.



THE EIGHTH

MEDITATION,

UPON PSALM xl. 8.

I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.

CASTING my eye upon this precious text, I find it perplexed and darkened with variety, yea, contrariety of expositions. The Jews and Socinians generally refer all to David, denying Christ to be the person here spoken of. Others refer the whole Psalm to Christ; but the best expositors refer it partly to David, and partly to Christ. That this paragraph in which my text lies, refers to Christ, is plain from the apostle's allegation of it in Heb. x. 5, 6, 7. In this

and the two former verses there lie three great points of truth, which you may take up in this order.

First, The insufficiency and rejection of all legal sacrifices, as things of no virtue in themselves to satisfy God, or save men, ver. 6. *These thou wouldest not* ; i. e. thou never didst appoint them to be the means of salvation, farther than they signified and pointed at me, and now must vanish when I come in a body of flesh ; according to that, Col. ii. 17.

Secondly, The introduction of a complete and sufficient means of redemption, ver. 7. *Lo, I come*.

Thirdly, The suitableness and agreeableness of this work of redemption to the heart and will of Jesus Christ, ver. 8. ‘ I delight to do thy will, O my God ; yea, thy law is within my heart ; ’ or, as it is in the Hebrew, *in the midst of my bowels*.

In the words we are to note two things, viz. *1st*, The rise and spring of man’s redemption. *2dly*, The acceptableness and suitableness of it to the heart of Christ.

1st, The rise and first spring of man’s redemption, the will and pleasure of God. So it pleased the Lord to appoint and order it, that a remnant of poor lost sinners should be saved.

The execution and accomplishment of this good pleasure of God, was that part which by agreement and consent was committed to the Son, and is here called a law, or command laid upon him ; and, answerably, the death of Christ is represented as an act of obedience, Phil. ii. 8. and respected God’s command for it ; John x. 18. ‘ This commandment have I received from my Father ; ’ referring to the covenant of redemption which was betwixt them from everlasting : And this was the rise and first spring of our redemption by Christ.

2dly, You have here the gratefulness and suitableness of this work to the heart of Christ, *I delight to do it ; it is in my heart : Lo, I come*.

The Hebrew words note not simple consent or willingness, but the highest pleasure and complacency that can be ; a work which ravishes his soul with the delights of it, *I delight to do thy will* ; and that other expression, *Thy law is within my heart*, or bowels, hath as deep a sense and signification as the former ; it notes the greatest care, solitude, and intention of mind, in keeping the most precious treasure that was committed to him ! for so the phrase is used in Prov. iv. 21. and so did our Redeemer esteem and reckon this work, which was by the Father demandated and committed to him. Hence the note is,

Doct. *That the will of God to redeem sinners by the incarnation and death of Jesus Christ, was most grateful and pleasing to the very heart of Christ.*

It is said, Prov. viii. 31. When he was solacing himself in the sweetest enjoyment of his Father, whilst he lay in that blessed bosom of delights, yet the very prospect of this work gave him pleasure, *Then were his delights with the sons of men*. And when he was come into the world, and had endured many abuses and injuries, and was

even now come to the most difficult part of the work ; yet, *how am I straitened*, or pained, (saith he) *till it be accomplished*, Luke xii. 50.

Two things call our thoughts to stay upon them in this point.

First, The decency of it, why it ought to be so.

Secondly, The reasons of it, whence it came to be so.

First, Why it ought to be a pleasant and grateful thing to Christ to take a body of flesh, and lay it down by death again for the redemption of sinners.

1. It became Christ to go about this work with cheerfulness and delight, that thereby he might give his death the nature and formality of a sacrifice.

In all sacrifices you shall find that God had still a regard, a special respect to the will of the offerer. See Exod. xxxv. 5, 21. and Lev. i. 3. the voluntariness and cheerfulness with which it is given, is of great regard with God.

2. It ought to be so, in regard of the unity of Christ's will, with the Father's. The work of our redemption is called *the pleasure of the Lord*, Isa. liii. 10. and what was the Father's pleasure, could not be displeasing to him who is one with the Father. It is impossible their wills can clash, whose nature is one.

3. This was necessary to magnify and commend the love of Jesus Christ to us, for whom he gave himself. That he came into the world to die for us, is a mercy of the first magnitude, but that he came in love to our souls, and underwent all his sufferings with such willingness for our sakes, this heightens it above all apprehension. O, this is the most taking, the most ravishing, the most astonishing consideration of all : ' He loved me, and gave himself for me,' Gal. ii. 20. ' He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,' Rev. i. 5. Here love is in its highest exaltation.

4. It was necessary to be so, for the regulating of all our obedience to God according to this pattern, that seeing and setting this great example of obedience before us, we might never grudge nor grumble at any duty or suffering that God should call us to : ' You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ; how, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor,' saith the apostle, when he would press the Corinthians to their duty, 2 Cor. viii. 9. And when he would effectually urge the Philippians to their duty, this is the argument, ' Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus,' Phil. ii. 5. So that it became and behoved Christ thus to undertake this great service.

Secondly, Next let us consider and examine whence it came to be so pleasant and acceptable to Jesus Christ, to come into the world and die for poor sinners.

And we shall find although the sufferings of Christ were exceeding sharp, and the cup of God's wrath unspeakably bitter, yet that which made it pleasant and desirable to Jesus Christ was the prospect he had of the sweet results and issues of his sufferings, Isa. liii. 10, 11.

‘He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied,’ (i. e.) he shall have great content and pleasure from the issues and fruits of his sufferings, as Psal. cxxviii. 2. ‘Thou shalt eat the labour of thy hands,’ (i. e.) the fruit of thy labours. So here, ‘He shall see the travail of his soul,’ (i. e.) the fruit and effects of his travail; and to see this shall be to him the reward and recompence of all his sufferings. Now, among the sweet results of the sufferings of Christ there are especially these three, which he foresaw with singular content and delectation.

First, That in his sufferings there would be made a glorious display and manifestation of the divine attributes; yea, such a glorious display of them, as was never made before to angels or to men, nor ever shall be any more in this world. For though,

1. The wisdom of God had made itself visible to men in the creation of the world, yet there it shone but in a faint and languishing beam, compared with this. Here divine wisdom put itself as it were into a visible form, and represented itself to the life. See 1 Cor. i. 24. and Eph. iii. 10. Behold, in the death of Christ, the wisdom of God in its highest exaltation and glory: O the manifold wisdom of God! O the depth of his unsearchable wisdom! which I touched in some particulars before.

Behold here the wisdom of God, raising more glory to himself by occasion of the breach of the law, than could ever have risen to him from the most punctual observation of its commands, or the most rigorous execution of its threatenings; from the occasion of the fall, which was our undoing, raising us to a far better estate, and with a much better security to enjoy it, than that from which we fell. Yea, behold and wonder, God by the death of Christ recovering his elect from all the danger and mischief of sin, and yet making the way and manner of their recovery the fairest glass to represent the horror and evil of sin to them, that ever was shewn them in this world. Oh, the triumph of divine wisdom.

2. Though the love of God had appeared before in our creation, protection, and provision, yet nothing to what it doth in our redemption by the death of Christ. Lo, here is the love of God in its strength and glory, 1 John iv. 10. ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ *Herein is love*, i. e. Here is the highest expression of God’s love to the creature; not only that ever was, but that ever can be made; for in love only God acted to the uttermost; whatever his power hath done, it can do more; but for his love, it can go no higher, he hath no greater thing to give than his Christ. It is true, in giving us a being, and that in the noblest rank and order of creatures on earth, herein was love. In feeding us all our life long by his assiduous tender providence, herein is love. In protecting us under his wings from innumerable dangers and mischiefs, herein is love: much love; and yet set all this by his redeeming love in Christ,

and it seems nothing. When we have said all, ‘herein is the love of God, that he sent his Son,’ &c. This was free love to undeserving, to ill-deserving sinners: preventing love; not that we loved him, but that he loved us. Just as an image in the glass, saith Facinus, that is imprinted there by the face looking into it; the image does not look back upon the face, except the face look forward upon the image; and in that the image doth seem to see the face, it is nothing else but that the face does see the image. O the inexpressible glory of the love of God in Christ!

3. Though God had given several sad marks of his justice before, both upon the angels that fell, clapping upon them the chains of darkness; in the overthrow of Sodom and the neighbouring cities, turning them to ashes, as you may read in Jude, ver. 6, 7. yet never was the exactness and severity of justice so manifested before, nor ever shall be any more, as it was at the death of Christ. Christ did not only satisfy it fully, but he also honoured it highly, making that attribute which was once a bar, now to be a bottom of our peace, Rom. iii. 25. Never did such a person as Christ stand at the bar of justice before: the blood of God was poured out to appease and satisfy it. When Christ suffered, he did both give and take satisfaction; he gave it to the justice of God in dying; he took it, in seeing justice so honoured in his death.

Secondly, Another delightful prospect Christ had of the fruit of his sufferings, was the recovery and salvation of all the elect by his death; and though his sufferings were exceeding bitter, yet such fruit of them as this was exceeding sweet: upon this account he assumed his name Jesus, Mat. i. 21. yea, and his human nature also, Gal. iv. 4, 5. Souls are of great value in his eyes: one soul is of more worth in his account than all the world, Mark viii. 36. What a pleasure then must it be to him, to save so many souls from the everlasting wrath of the great and terrible God! Add to this,

Thirdly, The glory which would redound to him from his redeeming ones to all eternity; for it will be the everlasting pleasant employment of the saints in heaven, to be ascribing glory, praise, and honour, to the Redeemer: “To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever,” Rev. i. 5, 6. The improvement of all this will be in a word or two.

Use 1. for conviction.

This truth then, in the first place, may convince, shame, and humble the very best of Christians, who find so little delight in the most easy, sweet, and spiritual duties of obedience, when Christ undertook and went through the most difficult task for them with such cheerfulness and readiness. “Lo, I come, thy law is in my heart, I delight to do thy will;” and yet the work he so applied himself to, was a work

full of difficulty, attended with reproach and shame, as well as anguish and pain.

Did Christ find pleasure in abasement and torment, in suffering and dying for me, and can I find no pleasure in praying, hearing, meditating, and enjoying the sweet duties of communion with him? Did he come so cheerfully to die for me, and do I go so dead-heartedly to prayers and sacraments, to enjoy fellowship with him? Was it a pleasure to him to shed his blood, and is it none to me to apply it, and reap the benefits of it? Oh, Lord, what an heart have I? How unsuitable is this frame of heart to the nature of God, whose essential excellencies make him the supreme delight, the sweet repose, solace, and rest of souls! Psalm xvi. 11.

How unsuitable to the principles of regeneration and holiness, purposely planted in the soul, to make spiritual performances a pleasure to it!

How unsuitable to the future expected state of glory, which brings the sanctified soul to a sweet complacential rest and satisfaction in God! In a word, how unsuitable is this temper of spirit to the heart of Jesus Christ! O, methinks I hear Christ thus expostulating with me this day:

Is this thy zeal and delight in the duties of obedience? Is it rather the awe of conscience than the pleasure of communion that brings thee to this duty? Doth thy hard heart need so many arguments to persuade it, even to the sweetest, easiest, and most pleasant duties in religion? Well, I did not love thee at that rate; my heart readily echoed to the Father's call, to die for thee, to drink the very dregs of the cup of trembling for thee. "I come, I come, I delight to do thy will, thy law is in the midst of my bowels."

2. *Use, of exhortation.*

If it be so, how great a motive have the people of God before them, to make them apply themselves with all cheerfulness and readiness of mind to all the duties of active and passive obedience! O, let there be no more grumblings, lazy excuses, shiftings of duty, or dead-hearted and listless performances of them, after such an example as this. Be ready to do the will of God; yea, be ye also ready to suffer it. Let the same mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus. The more pleasure and delight you find in doing or suffering the will of God, the more of Christ's spirit is in you, and the more of his image is upon you. Are not all holy duties expressed in scripture by the saints walking with God? Gen. xvii. 1. And is not this an angelical life? Can it be a burden to the ear to hear sweet ravishing strains of melody; or to the eye, to behold variety of pleasant and lively colours; or to the palate, to relish the delicious sweetness of meats and drinks?

Oh, reader, were thy heart more spiritual, more deeply sanctified, and heavenly, it would be no more pain to thee to pray, hear, or meditate on the things of God, than it is to a bird to carry and use his

own wings; or to a man, to eat the most pleasant food when he is an hungry; "I have rejoiced (saith David,) in the way of thy commandments, as much as in all riches," Psal. cxix. 14.

And as to sufferings for Christ, they should not be grievous to Christians, that know how Christ came from the bosom of the Father to die for them. What have we to leave or lose, in comparison with him? What are our sufferings to Christ's? Alas, there is no compare; there was more bitterness in one drop of his sufferings, than in a sea of ours.

To conclude, Your delight and readiness in the paths of obedience, is the very measure of your sanctification.

THE NINTH MEDITATION,

UPON ZECH. xii. part of ver. 10.

And they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced: and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son; and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.

THIS promise is confessed to have a special respect to the Jews conversion to Christ: It was in part accomplished in the apostles days, Acts ii. 37. yet that was but a specimen or handsel, of what shall be, when the body of that nation shall be called.

But yet it cannot be denied, that all Christians find the same piercing sorrows, and wounding sense of sin, when God awakens them by convictions, and brings them to see the evil of sin, and the grace of Christ, that is here expressed concerning them at their conversion.

The words present us with three very remarkable particulars in evangelical repentance; viz.

First, The spring and principle of it.

Secondly, The effects and fruits of it.

Thirdly, The depth and measure of it.

First, The spring and principle of repentance, expressed in these words, *They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced.* This looking upon Christ, is an act of faith; for so it is described in scripture, John vi. 40. Isa. xlv. 22. and it respects Christ crucified, as its proper object: Yea, and that by them, not only as their progenitors involved them in that guilt, by entailing it on them, but as their own sins were

the meritorious cause of his *death* and *sufferings*; *they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced.*

Secondly, The effects and fruits of such an aspect of faith upon Christ, is here also noted; *They shall mourn and be in bitterness*: i. e. it shall melt and thaw them into godly sorrow; it shall break their hard and stony hearts in pieces: The eye of faith shall affect their hearts. For indeed, evangelical sorrows are hearty and undissembled tears, dropping out of the eye of faith.

Thirdly, and lastly, The depth and measure of their sorrow is here likewise noted. And it is compared with the greatest and most piercing sorrows men are acquainted with in this world, even the sorrow of a tender-hearted Father, mourning over a dead son, yea, an only son, and his first-born; than which no earthly sorrow is more penetrating and sharp; Jer. vi. 26. Hence the note will be,

Doct. *That the sufferings of Christ are exceedingly powerful, to melt believers' hearts into godly sorrow.*

The eye of faith is a precious eye; and according to its various aspects upon Christ, it produceth various effects upon the hearts of men. Eyeing Christ as our complete righteousness; so it pacifies and quiets the heart: Eyeing him as our pattern; so it directs and regulates our actions: Eyeing him as a sacrifice offered up to divine justice for our sin; so it powerfully thaws the heart, and melts the affections.

By meltings, I do not only understand tears; as if they only were expressive of all spiritual sorrow: For it is possible, the waters of sorrow may run deep in the heart, when the eye cannot yield a drop.

There be two things in repentance; trouble and tears. The first is essential, the last contingent. The first flows from the influence of faith upon the soul; the last much depends upon the temper and constitution of the body. It is a mercy, when our tears can flow from a heart filled with sorrow for sin, and love to Christ; yet it often falls out, that there is an heavy heart, where the eyes are dry. But that there is efficacy in faith to melt the heart, by looking upon the sufferings of Christ for sin, is undoubted: And how it becomes so powerful an instrument to this end, I will shew you in the following particulars.

First, Faith eyes the dignity of the person of Christ, who was pierced for us; how excellent and glorious a person he is. In the captivity, it was for a lamentation, that "princes were hanged up by the hands, and the faces of elders were not honoured," Lam. v. 12. We read also the lamentation of David, 2 Sam. iii. 38. as he followed Abner's hearse, "A prince, and a great man, is fallen in Israel to-day."

But what was Abner, and what were the princes of Israel to the Son of God? Lo, here, by faith, the believer sees the Prince of the kings of the earth, the only begotten of the Father, equal to God, in nature and dignity, He, whom all the angels worship, hanging dead

upon the cursed tree. Faith sees royal blood, the blood of God poured out by the sword of justice, for satisfaction and reconciliation; and this cannot but deeply affect the believing soul.

Secondly, Faith represents the severity of divine justice to Jesus Christ, and the extremity of his sufferings; and this sight is a melting sight.

The apostle tells us, Gal. iii. 13. he was made *κατάρα*, a curse and execration for us. It relates to the kind and manner of his death upon the cross, which was the death of a slave; *servile supplicium*: A freeman was privileged from that punishment. It looks upon, and well considers the sad plight and condition Christ was in, in the days of his humiliation for us. It is said of him, Matth. xxvi. 28. He was *Περίλυπος*, *undequaque tristis*, surrounded with griefs; exactly answerable to his name, Isa. liii. 3. *a man of sorrows*. Let him look which way he would, outward or inward, upward or downward, to friends or enemies; he could behold nothing but sorrow, and what might increase his misery. Another *evangelist* saith, he was *sore amazed*; Mark xiv. 33. *Ἐκθαμβήσαι*: It notes such a consternation, as makes the hair of the head stand upright; *Horripilatio*. A third tells us, his *soul was troubled*, John xii. 27. *ἡ ψυχὴ μὲν ταρασσάται*, *undetartarus*, a word from whence hell is derived; and denoting the anguish and troubles of them that are in that place of torment.

And the fourth tells us, he was in an agony; Luke xxiii. 44. all expressing in several emphatical notions and metaphors, the extremity of Christ's anguish and torment. This cannot but greatly affect and break the believer's heart.

Thirdly, But then that which most affects the heart, is Christ's undergoing all this, not only in love to us, but in our room and stead. He suffered not for any evil he had done, for there was no guile found in his mouth, Isa. liii. 4, 5. But the just suffered for the unjust, 1 Pet. iii. 18. It was for me, a vile, wretched, worthless sinner. It was my pride, my earthliness, the hardness of my heart, the corruption of my nature, the innumerable evils of my life, that brought him down to the dust of death: 'He was made sin for us, who knew no sin,' 2 Cor. v. 21.

Who can believably eye Christ, as suffering such pains, such wrath, such a curse, in the room of such a sinner, such a rebel, so undeserving, and so ill-deserving a creature, and not mourn as for an only son, and be in bitterness as for a first-born?

Fourthly, Faith melts the heart, by considering the effects and fruits of the sufferings of Christ, what great things he hath purchased by his stripes and blood for poor sinners; a full and final pardon of sin, a well-settled peace with God, a sure title and right to the eternal inheritance; and all this for thee, a law condemned, a self-condemned sinner. Lord, what am I, that such mercies as these should be purchased by such a price for me? For me, when thousands and ten

thousands of sweeter dispositions must burn in hell for ever! Oh, what manner of love is this!

Fifthly, Faith melts the heart, by exerting a threefold act upon Christ crucified:

1st, A realizing act, representing all this in the greatest certainty and evidence that can be. These are no devised fables, but the sure and infallible reports of the gospel.

2dly, An applying act; 'He loved me, and gave himself for me,' Gal. iii. 20. 'He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,' Rev. i. 5.

3dly, and *lastly*, By an inferring or reasoning act. If Christ died for me, then I shall never die: If his blood were paid down for me, then my sins, which are many, are forgiven me: If he was condemned in my room, I am acquitted, and shall be saved from wrath to come, through him. O how weighty do these thoughts prove to believing souls!

1. *Use, for information.*

Then sure there is but little faith, because there is so much deadness and unaffectedness among professors. A believing sight of Christ will work upon a gracious heart, as a dead son, a beloved and only son, uses to do upon a tender father's heart.

Reader, was it ever thy sad lot to look upon such an heart-rending object? Didst thou ever feel the pangs and commotions in thy bowels that some have felt upon such a sight? Why, so will thy heart work towards Christ, if ever thou believingly lookest on him whom thou hast pierced.

Infer. 2. Then the acting and exercising of faith is the best expedient to get a tender heart, and raise the dead affections.

We are generally full of complaints, how hard, how dead and stupid our hearts are; we are often putting such cases as these, how shall I get a heart broken for sin? How shall I raise my dead heart in duty? Why this is the way, no expedient in all the world like this; look upon him whom thou hast pierced; it is the melting argument.

2. *Use, of examination.*

But that which I especially aim at in this point, is for the trial and examination of thy heart, reader, in the point of true evangelical repentance, which is thy proper business at this time; and I will go no further than the text for rules to examine and try it by.

Rule 1. All evangelical repentance hath a supernatural spring, 'I will pour out the Spirit of grace, and they shall mourn.' Till the Spirit be poured out upon us, it is as easy to press water out of a rock, as to make our hearts relent and mourn. There are indeed

natural meltings, the effects of an ingenuous temper, but these differ in kind and nature from godly sorrow.

Rule 2. Godly sorrows are real, sincere, and undissembled; they ‘shall mourn, as for an only son.’

Parents need not any natural helps to draw tears on such accounts; O! their very hearts are pierced, they could even die with them; sighs, groans, and tears, are not hanged out as false signs of what is not to be found in their hearts.

Rule 3. Evangelical sorrow is very deep; so much the mourning for an only son, a first-born, must import. These waters, how still soever they be, run deep, very deep, in the bottom channel of the soul. See Acts ii. 37. *They were cut to the heart.*

Rule 4. Faith is the instrument employed in breaking the heart; ‘they shall look, and mourn.’ This is the burning-glass that contracts the beams, and fires the affections.

Rule 5. Lastly, The wrong sin hath done to God, and the sufferings it hath brought Christ under, are the piercing and heart-wounding considerations: ‘They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced, and mourn.’ The piercing of Christ by our sin, is that which must pierce thy soul with sorrow.

THE TENTH

MEDITATION,

UPON JOHN vi. 55.

For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

IN the context our Lord Jesus Christ makes a most spiritual and excellent discourse to the Jews, about the nature and necessity of faith in him; taking the occasion thereof from the bread, which a little before he had so miraculously multiplied and fed them with; raising up their minds to more sublime and spiritual things, and letting them know that bread, how sweet soever it was, was but a shadow of himself, infinitely more sweet and necessary.

These words are a proposition, in which are these three things observable:

First, The subject; my flesh and my blood.

Secondly, The predicate; it is meat and drink.

Thirdly, The manner of predication; it is meat indeed, and drink indeed.

First, The subject ; my flesh and blood, i. e. my humanity : this is meat and drink, true spiritual food. If it be demanded, why he had not said, I am meat and drink indeed ; but rather chuses to say, my flesh and blood is so ? The reason is evident, saith learned Camero ; because if you take away flesh and blood from Christ, he cannot be food or life to us : for, in order to his being so, he must satisfy God for us, and obtain the remission of our sins ; but without shedding of blood there is no remission. Now, forasmuch as by the offering up of his body, and shedding of his blood, he hath obtained pardon and life for us ; therefore his flesh and his blood, is called our meat and our drink, that by which our souls live. Which brings us to the second thing :

Secondly, The predicate ; it is meat and drink : i. e. It is to our souls of the same use and necessity, that meat and drink are to our natural life, which cannot be sustained, or continued without them.

The life of our souls as necessarily depends upon the flesh and blood of Christ, as our natural life doth upon meat and drink. Yet beware of a mistake here : the flesh and blood, or the humanity of Christ, is not the fountain of our spiritual life, but the channel rather through which it flows to us from his divinity. By reason of his incarnation and death, righteousness and life came to us.

Thirdly, The manner of predication is very emphatical ; it is ‘ meat indeed, and drink indeed.’ Which notes two things :

First, Reality, in opposition to all legal shadows and types.

Secondly, Transcendent excellency, far surpassing all other food, even manna itself, which, for its excellency, is stiled *angels food*. ‘ My flesh is meat indeed,’ i. e. true, substantial, and real food to souls, and choice, excellent, and incomparable food. Hence observe,

Doct. *That what meat and drink is to our bodies, that, and much more than that, the flesh and blood of Christ is to believing souls.*

Two things require explication on this point. *First*, Wherein the resemblance, or agreement lies, betwixt the flesh and blood of Christ, and meat and drink ? *Secondly*, Wherein the former transcends and excels the latter ?

1. *Query*. Wherein lies the resemblance and agreement between the flesh and blood of Christ, and material meat and drink ?

Sol. The agreement is manifest in the following particulars.

First, Meat and drink is necessary to support natural life ; we cannot live without it. Upon this account, bread is called the staff and stay ; i. e. the support of the natural spirits, which do as much lean and depend upon it, as a feeble man doth upon his staff ; Isa. iii. 1. But yet how necessary soever it be, the flesh and blood of Christ is more indispensibly necessary for the life of our souls ; John vi. 53. ‘ Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.’ Our souls have more absolute need of peace and

pardon by Christ, than our bodies have of meat and drink. Better our bodies were starved and famished, than our souls damned and lost for ever.

Secondly, Meat and drink are ever most sweet and desirable, to those that are hungry and thirsty. It is hunger and thirst, that gives value and estimation to meat and drink; Prov. xxvii. 7. 'To the hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet;' and so it is in our esteem of Christ; John vii. 37. 'If any man thirst, let him come to me, and drink. When God, by illumination and conviction, makes men deeply sensible of their miserable, lost, and perishing condition; then ten thousand worlds for Christ. All is but dung and dross, in comparison of the excellency of Christ Jesus.

Thirdly, Meat and drink must undergo an alteration, and lose its own form, before it actually nourishes the body. The corn is ground to pieces in the mill, before it be made bread to nourish us. And Christ must be ground betwixt the upper and nether millstone of the wrath of God, and malice of men, to be made bread for our souls. The prophet saith, Isa. lii. 14. *His visage is marred more than any man's*. He did not look like himself, the beauty and glory of heaven; but the reproach of men, and despised of the people. Oh what an alteration did his incarnation and sufferings make upon him! Phil. ii. 6, 7. *Quantum mutatus ab illo!*

Fourthly, Natural food must be received into our bodies, and have a natural union with them; and Christ must be received into our souls, and have a spiritual union with them by faith; or else we can have no nourishment, or benefit by him. An empty profession, a mere talkative religion, nourishes the inner man, just as much as the sight of meat, and our commending of it, doth our outward man. It is Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, Eph. iii. 17. our receiving of him, John i. 12. our eating his flesh, and drinking his blood, John vi. 53. i. e. The effectual application of Christ to our souls by faith, that makes us partakers of his benefits.

Fifthly, Meat and drink must be taken every day, or else natural life will languish; and spiritual life will never be comfortably maintained in us, without daily communion with Jesus Christ. If a gracious soul neglect, or be interrupted in its course of duties, and stated times of prayer; it will be quickly discernible by the Christian himself, in the deadness of his own heart; and by others also, in the barrenness of his discourses. And in these things stands the analogy, and agreement of the flesh and blood of Christ, with meat and drink.

2. *Query*. The next thing is to open the transcendent excellency of *Christ's flesh and blood*, above all other food in the world. And this appears in four particulars.

First, This flesh and blood was assumed into the nearest union with the second person in the blessed Trinity, and so is not only dignified above all other created beings, but becomes the first receptacle of all

grace, intended to be communicated through it to the children of men; John i. 14.

Secondly, This flesh and blood of Christ was offered up to God, as the great sacrifice for our sins, and purchase of our peace; Col. i. 20. Eph. v. 2. and so it is of inestimable price and value to believers. The human nature of Christ was the sacrifice, the divine nature was the altar on which it was offered up, and by which it was dignified and sanctified, and made an offering of a sweet-smelling savour to God, Eph. v. 2.

Thirdly, This flesh and blood of Christ, is the great *medium* of conveyance of all blessings and mercies to the souls and bodies of believers. It lies as a vast pipe at the fountain-head of blessings, receiving and conveying them from God to men; Col. i. 14, 19.

So then, it being united to the second person, and so become the flesh and blood of God; it being the sacrifice offered up to God for atonement and remission of sins, and the medium of conveying all grace and mercy from God to the fountain, to the souls and bodies of believers: how sweet a relish must it have upon the palate of faith? Here faith may taste the sweetness of a pardon; a full, free, and final pardon of sin; than which nothing in this world can be sweeter to a sin-burning conscience.

Here it tastes the incomparable sweetness of peace with God, *a peace which passeth understanding*: The breach sin made, is by this sacrifice made up for ever; Col. i. 20.

Here it tastes the inexpressible sweetness of acceptation with God, and an interest in his favour; a mercy, which a poor convinced soul would give ten thousand worlds for, were it to be purchased. Yea, here it relisheth all the sweet promises in the covenant of grace, as confirmed and ratified by this sacrifice; Heb. ix. 5. So that well might he say, 'My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed;' the most excellent New Testament food for believers.

I. *Use, of Information.*

First, See here the love of a Saviour, that heavenly *pelican*, who feeds us with his own flesh and blood. You read, Lam. iv. 10. of pitiful women, who eat the flesh of their own children; but where have you read of men or women, that gave their own flesh and blood for meat and drink to their children? Think on this, you that are so loth to cross and deny your flesh for Christ: He suffered his flesh to be rent, and his blood set abroad for you: What love like the love of Christ!

Secondly, Learn hence a ground of content, in the lowest and poorest condition allotted to any believer in this world. It may be some of you live low in the world; you have hard fare, and are abridged of many of those sweet comforts in the creature, which the enemies of God abound in: But still remember you have no cause to envy

their dainties, and be dissatisfied with your own lot and portion; when not many nobles, or mighty in the world, feed as your souls do feed. O what a feast have you! What dainties do your souls taste by faith; whilst others do but feed upon ashes and husks? What is the flesh of lambs and calves out of the stall, to the flesh of Christ? Amos vi. 4, 5, 6. What is wine in bowls, and the chief ointment, to the blood of Christ, and the anointings of his Spirit? O to be satisfied with your outward lot, however God hath cast it, whilst he hath dealt so bountifully with your souls.

Thirdly, Learn hence the necessity of faith, in order to the livelihood and subsistence of our souls. What is a feast to him that cannot taste it? And what is Christ to him that cannot believe? That cannot, by faith, eat his flesh, and drink his blood?

It is not the preparation made for souls in Christ, but the application of him by faith, that gives us the sweetness and benefit of him. Faith is the soul's mouth, or palate: The unbeliever tastes no sweetness in Christ; he can relish more sweetness in money, meat, drink, carnal mirth, or any sensual enjoyment than in Christ.

Fourthly, How excellent are gospel ordinances? What sweetness is there to be found in them by true believers? For there Christ is prepared, and, as it were, served in for them to feed upon. It is your minister's work, to prepare for you all the week long, and to furnish for you *a feast of fat things*. Lo here is a table spread and furnished this day, with the costliest dainties that heaven affords! O prize these mercies: sit not here with flat, or wanton appetites, lest God call to your enemies, and bid them take away.

II. *Use of exhortation.*

Is the flesh and blood of Christ meat and drink indeed? Then let me exhort you, brethren.

First, To come to this table with sharp and hungry appetites. Have you ever *tasted*, *That the Lord is gracious*? And do you not hunger and thirst, to *taste* it again? Surely, "Where the carcase is, thither will the eagles be gathered;" Matth. xxiv. 28. There is a twofold appetite; a dainty, and an hungry appetite. Beware of a nice and dainty appetite, that can relish nothing in the most solid and spiritual duties, except the dish be garnished with flowers of rhetoric, or the matter served in with art and elegance. This hath been the great sin of the professors of this generation. O Christians! no more of that I pray you. Were you really an hungered and athirst for Christ, you would come to his ordinances, as famishing men to a feast.

Secondly, To feed heartily upon Christ, in every ordinance, and in every sacrament especially. O that your souls might hear, and answer that invitation this day! Cant. v. 1. 'Eat, O friends: drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.'

For motives, I will only hint these three following.

First, Christ is the matter of the feast. God hath prepared him

for your souls. Is any thing in heaven or earth so sweet, as Christ sacrificed is? Do not the angels and saints in heaven feast upon him? Surely one drop of Christ's blood hath more sweetness and excellency in it, than the whole ocean of all creature-comforts.

Secondly, Do not your graces need it? Have you not a languishing love, a staggering faith, dull and sluggish desires? Look into your hearts, and see what need there is of *strengthening the things that are in you, which are ready to die*. O feed upon Christ, that your graces may be revived and strengthened.

Thirdly, Do you know how many days you are to go in the strength of this meal? How long it may be, ere you sit again at the Lord's table? Surely, even these, as well as your inferior temporal comforts, stand upon terms of greatest uncertainty. Ah Christians! consider well the times you live in, the enemy that stands ready to take away the cloth, and remove your spiritual food from you. It is said of Peter Martyr, that being in Oxford when queen Mary came in, and hearing the first mass-bell ring; he was struck to the heart, and said, *Hæc una notula omnem meam doctrinam evertit*: This one tinkling bell overthrows all the labours of my ministry at once.

God grant that we may hear none of that music in England any more: but it is like to be, according to your estimation and improvement of Christ's precious ordinances.

Thirdly, *Commend the experienced sweetness of Christ to others*. Do not conceal his loveliness and excellency. Thus the fair and enamoured spouse charges, or adjures others; Cant. v. 9. Be not content to feast upon Christ alone, whilst other souls are starving, and perhaps the souls of your dear natural relations. Say to them, as David, Psal. xxxiv. 8. 'O taste and see how good the Lord is.'

Fourthly, and *lastly*, *See that your appetite to Christ be right, and truly spiritual*. Such an hunger and thirst, upon which blessedness is entailed by promise. And you may conclude it so, when,

First, It is a sharp and strong appetite, Psal. xlii. 1. Let your thoughts run upon Christ night and day; even continually.

Secondly, When it is an universal appetite, after every thing in Christ; his holiness, as well as his righteousness; his commands, as well as his promises; for *he is altogether lovely*, Cant. v. 16.

Thirdly, When it is a continued appetite. I mean not, that the pulse of your desires should keep an even stroke at all times, but that there be real and sincere workings of heart after him always; Psal. cxix. 20.

Fourthly, When it is an industrious appetite, awakening the soul to the use of all means, and practice of all duties, in order to satisfaction; Psal. xxvii. 4. 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that I will seek after.'

Fifthly, and *lastly*, It is then a right, when it is an insatiable appetite, never to be allayed with any thing beside Christ; Psal. lxxiii.

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. lxiii. 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.

THE TWELFTH
MEDITATION,

UPON EPH. iii. 19.

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.

THE knowledge of Christ, and of his love, is deservedly, in this place, set down among the *desiderata Christianorum*, the most desirable enjoyments of believers in this world. This love of Christ had entered the apostle's heart; he was swallowed up in the meditation and admiration of it, and would have all hearts inflamed and affected with it, as his was.

Some think the apostle speaks extatically in this place, and knows not how to make the parts of his discourse consistent with each other, when he puts them upon endeavours to know that love of Christ, which himself confesses to pass knowledge.

But though his heart was ravished with the love of Christ, yet there is no contradiction or inconsistency in his discourse. He doth earnestly desire for the Ephesians, that they may know the love of Christ; i. e. that they may experimentally know his love, which passeth knowledge: That is, as some expound it, all other kinds of knowledge; yea, and all knowledge of Christ, which is not practical and experimental. Or thus: Labour to get the clearest and fullest apprehensive knowledge of Christ and his love, that is attainable in this world, though you cannot arrive to a perfect comprehensive knowledge of either. *Mens humana hoc et capit, et none capit; atque in eo capit, quod rapitur in admirationem*: as others reconcile it.

The note from it is,

Doct. *That the love of Christ surpasses, and transcends, the knowledge of the most illuminated believers.*

The love of Christ is too deep for any created understanding to fathom; it is unsearchable love, and it is so in divers respects.

1. It is unsearchable, in respect of its antiquity; No understanding of man can trace it back to its first spring; it flows from one eternity to another. We receive the fruits and effects of it now; but, O how ancient is that root that bears them! He loved us before this world was made, and will continue so to do, when it shall be reduced into ashes. It is said, Prov. viii. 29, 30, 31. 'When he gave the sea his decree, when he appointed the foundations of the earth; then was I by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him: rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth, and my delights were with the sons of men.'

2. The freeness of the love of Christ passes knowledge. No man knows, nor can any words express, how free the love of Christ to his people is: It is said, Isa. lv. 8. *My thoughts are not your thoughts.* The meaning is, *My grace, mercy, and love* to you, is one thing, as it is in my thoughts, and quite another thing when it comes into your thoughts. In my thoughts, it is like itself, free, rich, and unchangeable; but in your thoughts it is limited and narrowed, pinched in within your strait and narrow conceptions; that it is not like itself, but altered according to the model and platform of creatures, according to which you draw it in your minds. Alas! we do but alter and spoil his love, when we think there is any thing in us, or done by us, that can be a motive, inducement, or recompence to it. His love is so free, that it pitched itself upon us, before we had any loveliness in us at all: 'when we were in our blood, he said unto us, live;' and that was the time of love. It did not stay till we had our ornaments upon us; but embraced us in our blood, in our most loathsome state; and of all seasons, that is the season of love, the chosen time of love, Ezek. xvi. 7, 8. Christ loved us, not upon the account of any foreseen excellency in us, or upon any expectation of recompence from us: Nay, he loved us not only without, but against our deserts. Nothing in nature is found so free, as the love of Christ is; our thoughts therefore of this love going beyond all examples and instances that are found amongst men, quickly lose themselves in an immense ocean of free grace, where they can find neither bank nor bottom.

The bounty and liberality of the love of Christ to his people, passeth knowledge. Who can number, or value the fruits of his love? They are more than the sands upon the sea shore. It would weary the arm of an angel, to write down the thousandth part of the effects of his love, which come to the share of any particular Christian in this world. Who can tell how many sins it pardons? 'The free gift is of many offences unto justification;' Rom. v. 16. How many dangers it prevents; or how many wants it supplies? This, we know, that 'of his fulness we all receive grace for grace;' John i. 16. But how full of grace Christ is, and how many mercies have flowed, and shall flow to us out of that fountain of love; this is unknown to men, to the best, wisest, and most observant men. O if the records of the mercies of our lives were, or could be gathered and kept, what vast volumes would they swell to! It is true, indeed, you have the total sum given you in 1 Cor. iii. 22. *All are yours;* but it is such a number, as no man can number.

The constancy of Christ's love to his people passeth knowledge: No length of time, no distance of place, no change of condition, either with him or us, can possibly make any alteration of his affections towards us: 'He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever,' Heb. xiii. 8. It is noted also by the evangelist; John xiii. 1. 'That

having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.' It is true, his condition is altered; he is no more in this world conversing with his people, as he did once in the *days of his flesh*: He is now at the right-hand of God, in the highest glory; but yet his heart is the same that ever it was, for love and tenderness to his people. Our conditions also are often altered in this world; but his love suffers no alteration. Yea, which is much more admirable, we do many things daily, that grieve him, and offend him; yet he takes not away his loving-kindness from us, nor suffers his faithfulness to fail. We pour out so much cold water of unkindness and provocation, as is enough to cool and quench any love in the world, except his love; but notwithstanding all, he continues unchangeable in love to us. This Peter found, notwithstanding that great offence of his: No sooner was the Lord risen from the dead, but he greets him in the style of his former love and antient respect; *Go tell the disciples, and tell Peter.*

So then the love of Christ is a love transcending all creature-love, and human understanding. We read in Rom. v. 7, 8. that 'peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die;' but we never find where any, beside Jesus Christ, would lay down his life for enemies. It is recorded as an unparalleled instance of love in Damon and Pythias, the two Sicilian philosophers, that each had courage enough to die for his friend. One of them being condemned to die by the tyrant; and desiring to give the last farewell to his family; his friend went into prison for him, as his surety to die for him, if he returned not at the appointed time: But he did not die; yea, he had such a confidence in his friend, that he would not suffer him by default to die for him; and if he had, yet he had died for his friend. But such was the love of Christ, that it did not only put him into danger of death, but put him actually unto death, yea, the worst of deaths, and that for his enemies. O what manner of love was this! We read of the love that Jacob had for Rachel, and how he endured both the cold of winter, and heat of summer, for her sake. But what is this to the love of Jesus, who for us endured the heat of God's wrath? Beside, she was beautiful, but we unlovely. David wished for Absalom his son, *Would God I had died for thee!* But it was but a wish; and had it come to the proof, David would have shrunk from death, for all the affection he bare his beautiful son. But Christ actually gave his life for us, and did not only wish he had done it. O love, transcending the love of creatures; yea, and surmounting all creature-knowledge!

The *uses* follow.

1. *Use.* If the love of Christ pass knowledge, O then admire it! yea, live and die in the wonder and admiration of the love of Christ! As it is a sign of great weakness, to admire small and common things; so it speaks great stupidity not to be affected with great and unusual things. O Christian! if thou be one that conversest with the thoughts

of this love, thou canst not but admire it; and the more thou studi-
est, the more still wilt thou be astonished at it. And among the
many wonders that will appear in the love of Christ, these two will
most of all affect thee, viz.

1. That ever it pitched at first on thee.

2. That it is not, by so many sins, quenched towards thee.

1. It is admirable, that ever the love of Christ pitched at first upon
thee; for are there not millions in the world, of sweeter tempers,
and better constitutions than thyself, whom it hath passed by, and yet
embraced thee? ‘Lord, (said the disciples) how is it, that thou wilt
manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?’ John xiv. 22.
Surely he did not set his love upon thee, nor choose thee, because
thou wast better than others, but because he loved thee.

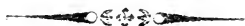
2. It is admirable, that his love to thee is not extinguished by so
many sins as thou hast committed against him. Lay thy hand, Chris-
tian, this day upon thy heart, and bethink thyself, how many have
been the provocations, wrongs, and dishonours thou hast been guilty
of against thy God, and that since he called thee by his grace, and set
his love upon thee. What, and yet love thee still! Yea, notwith-
standing all, he is still thy God, and loves thee with an unchangeable
love. O, with how many notwithstanding is his love continued to
thy soul! All this is just matter of admiration and wonder for ever.

3. Is the love of Christ past knowledge, an unsearchable love?
Then learn, whence and why it is, that the souls of believers never
are, nor can be tired, in beholding and enjoying Jesus Christ. We
use to say, one thing is tiresome; and it is very true, if it be an earth-
ly thing, it will be so, how sweet or excellent soever it seems at first:
And the reason is, because the best creature-enjoyment is but a shal-
low thing, and a few thoughts will sound it to the bottom; and there
being no supply of new matter, to feed the hungry soul upon, it is
quickly sated and cloyed with the repetition of the same thing over
and over. But it is far otherwise in Christ: For though he be but one,
yet in that one thing all things are virtually and eminently contained;
so that every day he seems a new Christ for sweetness, and yet is the
same Christ still. And in heaven the redeemed shall view him with
as much wonder, and love him with as much ardour, after millions
of years, as they did at their first sight of him. O, there is no bot-
tom in the love of Christ; it passeth knowledge.

4. In a word; Bestow your best and chiefest love upon Christ,
whose love to you passeth all knowledge. Let no creature be loved
equally with Christ; but as his love to you passeth all creature-love,
so let yours to him be a matchless love.

Believer; Christ loves thee with an unsearchable love; he loves
thee more than the dearest friend, *that is as thine own soul*, loves thee.
He loves thee more than thou lovest thy child, or the wife of thy bo-
som; more than thy soul loves thy body, with which it is so intimate-
ly united: And wilt thou content thyself with such poor, narrow, re-

miss affections to Jesus Christ? O look upon him this day in his red garments! Behold him in the strength of his love, breaking through the curse of the law, the wrath of God, the agonies of death, to bring home the fruits of his eternal love to thy soul; and whilst thou art beholding, and musing upon it, let thy heart melt, thy eyes drop, and thy very soul cry out, ‘Behold how he loved me! Blessed be God for Jesus Christ.’



A FAMILIAR CONFERENCE

BETWEEN A

MINISTER AND A DOUBTING CHRISTIAN,

CONCERNING THE

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.

Christian.] **S**IR, if it may be no interruption to your studies, I would be glad to be resolved of several doubts, that arise in my mind, about receiving the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Minister.] ‘I shall be very glad to contribute any thing for removing those scruples which may disturb you upon that account; therefore, pray go on.’

Christian.] Sir, I have heard many sermons, and read several discourses, which do much urge and declare the necessity of communicating in this blessed ordinance; and yet I durst never presume to join therein.

Minister.] ‘Have you then hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty?’

Christian.] To speak freely, Sir, I never yet did communicate therein all my life; because I have much questioned, whether I were worthy to receive that blessed and holy seal, to the glory of God, and my own edification and comfort; since I never truly understood the institution, nature, administration, and ends of it, nor the qualifications of those who are to be partakers thereof, according to the appointment of Jesus Christ.