



PURITAN
Treasures
FOR TODAY

*Holy
Meditation*

THOMAS
MANTON

EDITED BY J. STEPHEN YUILLE

*Everyone meditates—on something.
How much do you meditate on spiritual truth?*

The Puritans viewed meditation as essential for spiritual growth and effectiveness in spiritual duties—a crucial link between reading, hearing, and praying God's Word. Proper meditation will cultivate discernment, deepen repentance, and encourage devotion.

The Puritans taught about *occasional meditation* and *set meditation*. Both are invaluable for developing a true knowledge of God and practical applications in life. *Holy Meditation* helps believers discover the transformative effect of biblical meditation on the mind and heart.

"This new edition on meditation is particularly helpful because the chapters are brief, readable, and easy to digest. I would confidently pass it along to a new believer while at the same time knowing that any mature saint would be spiritually energized by its counsel. Manton's consistently clear and practical use of Scripture is so convicting that it gave me a hunger to delight in God's Word in a greater way."

David Saxton, pastor of Cambridge Bible Church, Cambridge, Ohio;
author of *God's Battle Plan for the Mind: The Puritan Practice of
Biblical Meditation*

THOMAS MANTON attended the University of Oxford at age 15, was ordained at 19, and later served as Oliver Cromwell's chaplain. He joined other Puritans in opposing the 1662 Act of Uniformity and resigned his church in protest. Manton continued to preach from home until his death in 1677.

 Reformation
Heritage Books

ISBN 979-8-88686-229-4
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Holy Meditation

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Thomas Manton

Edited & Abridged
by J. Stephen Yuille

Puritan Treasures for Today
Series Editor: J. Stephen Yuille



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Holy Meditation

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Reformation Heritage Books

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

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Italics in Scripture quotations added by the author for emphasis.

Printed in the United States of America

25 26 27 28 29 30/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 979-8-88686-229-4

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Preface

Whether we realize it or not, we are always meditating. By this I mean that our minds are continually dwelling on something. While driving to work, sitting in the doctor's office, standing in line in the coffee shop, or lying awake in bed in the dead of night, our minds are active. Sadly, many of us allow our minds to wander dangerously into the realm of negative thoughts—depressing, embittering, distracting, and enticing. These thoughts, in turn, exert a tremendous power over the soul, often to our detriment. It is for this reason that we need to learn to fix our fluttering minds on God's Word.

This spiritual discipline is known as biblical meditation. When we speak of meditation, we are not referring to reading or studying God's Word but musing and mulling over God's Word, whereby it grips us. When we meditate, our goal is not to fill the head but improve the heart. As we patiently steep the tea bag so that its flavor permeates the hot water, we immerse ourselves in God's Word so that it permeates us. We bring

the truths of God to remembrance and seriously ponder them and apply them to ourselves. Such meditation has a transforming influence (Eph. 4:23; Phil. 4:8) in that it cultivates discernment, deepens repentance, encourages mortification, inflames devotion, produces maturity, imparts comfort, and instills joy and thanksgiving.

It has been said that whatever rules our hearts controls our lives. That being the case, we must make it our daily ambition to be “nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:6). Metaphorically, the expression “nourished” means to digest inwardly. The verb is a present participle, indicating an ongoing process. In short, we must regularly feed on God’s Word. Putting food in our mouths does us no good unless we digest it. Similarly, filling our minds with God’s Word does us no good unless we meditate on it.

The Puritans viewed biblical meditation as an indispensable spiritual discipline. As J. I. Packer explains,

Knowing themselves to be creatures of thought, affection, and will, and knowing that God’s way to the human heart (will) is via the human head (the mind), the Puritans practiced meditation...on the whole range of biblical truth as they saw it applying to themselves.... In meditation the Puritan would seek to search and challenge his heart, stir

his affections to hate sin and love righteousness, and encourage himself with God's promises.¹

They believed biblical meditation occupies a place of distinction among the spiritual duties (or means of grace) because it is practiced in conjunction with all of them and ultimately determines their success. Study is fruitless, prayer is lifeless, and listening to sermons and celebrating the Lord's Supper are ineffective apart from intentional meditation on Scripture. This cause-and-effect relationship is entrenched in the Puritan mindset. As Joel Beeke observes, "Meditation was a daily duty that enhanced every other duty of the Puritan's Christian life."²

Thomas Manton (1620–1677) speaks for the entire movement when he affirms that faith is the key to the spiritual life because it is necessary to all other graces. He explains, "Love works, hope waits, patience endures, and zeal quickens," but "faith has the greatest stroke in all these things."³ But here is the all-important question: Where does such faith come from? For Manton, it is "fed and increased" by God's Word. That is why he gives so much attention to the practice of spiritual duties such as

1. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Crossway, 1990), 24.

2. Joel Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 75.

3. Thomas Manton, *The Life of Faith*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London, 1870–1875; repr., Solid Ground Christian Books, 2008), 15:50.

praying, hearing God's Word, and celebrating the Lord's Supper.⁴ The Holy Spirit works through these God-appointed means to create and cultivate faith in us. But pivotal to the success of these spiritual duties is meditation. For Manton, it alone is "the life of all the means of grace, and that which makes them fruitful to our souls."⁵

Manton is convinced that there is a power of the soul that lies between our physical senses (i.e., sight, sound, smell, taste, touch) and our understanding, which makes our thoughts real and vivid to us. This power captures the affections, which in turn direct the will. When the soul's faculties are rightly ordered, practice follows affection, affection follows persuasion, and persuasion follows knowledge. Sadly, because of humanity's fall into sin, this order in the soul has been "subverted."⁶ In our fallen condition, our senses have become the "cinque ports [five doors] by which sin is let out and taken in."⁷ When they hold sway, the power of the soul that stands between our senses and our understanding quickly loses sight of God's greatness, righteousness, and lovingkindness; the majesty of Christ, the beauty of grace, and the reality of eternity. These truths become mere abstractions,

4. Manton, *Sermons on Titus 2:11–14*, in *Complete Works*, 16:155–60.

5. Manton, *Psalms 119*, in *Complete Works*, 7:479.

6. Manton, *Psalms 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:351.

7. Manton, *Psalms 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:389–90.

and, as a result, our affections lose order, and our mind loses focus.

It is for this reason that the believer must engage in “regular and deliberate meditation.” Again, this is not to be confused with reading, whereby we gather information from Scripture, or hearing, whereby we listen to sermons based on Scripture.⁸ While important, reading and hearing—without meditation—are like “a winter sun that shines but warms not.”⁹ When we meditate, we move beyond mere reading and hearing to ponder God’s Word so that it enters into the heart.¹⁰ In other words, we digest it, bringing its truths to remembrance, considering them until they are impressed deep within us. Water is naturally cold, but fire makes it hot, causing it to boil. Likewise, our hearts are naturally cold, but meditation makes them hot, causing them to boil with love for God and His Word. “If you mean to keep in the fire,” counsels Manton, “you must ply the bellows and blow hard.”¹¹

Specifically, we meditate on God that we may love Him, sin that we may hate it, hell that we may avoid it, and heaven that we may pursue it.¹² We fill our minds with thoughts of God’s promises and warnings, our

8. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:105–6.

9. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:140.

10. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:106.

11. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 7:80.

12. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:144.

misery on account of sin, Christ's manifold offices, Christ's work of redemption and intercession, the gift of regeneration, the demands of discipleship, the brevity of life, the certainty of death, and the day of judgment. Such meditation makes a "practical improvement" on us,¹³ as summed up in the psalmist's declaration, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11). We cherish God's Word in our hearts through "knowledge" of it, "assent" to it, and "serious and sound digestion of it."¹⁴ As our hearts are "replenished with holy meditation," it "inflames and enkindles" our affections after heavenly things, resulting in obedience.

Is it possible that much of our struggle with sin and temptation is because, in large part, we have not cherished God's Word in our heart? Is it possible that much of what ails us in our Christian journey is the direct result of an undisciplined mind? Is it possible that we have become so accustomed to carnal dreams, guilty feelings, passing pleasures, and distracting entertainments that they have created great chasms in our minds into which all our thoughts are drained, thereby resulting in spiritual inertia? Sinclair Ferguson counsels, "If our minds are dull and lifeless, then our Christian lives will reflect it. But if our minds are filled with great thoughts

13. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 7:92.

14. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:100.

about Christ, which then filter into our affections, our lives will show that He stands at their center.”¹⁵

Recognizing that the mind is the key to holy living, the purpose of the present volume is to provide you with an insightful and accessible primer on the practice of biblical meditation.¹⁶ The emphasis in chapters 1–18 is instructional. These chapters contain the time-tested counsel of a mature and experienced pastor as he extols the many benefits that arise from biblical meditation while warning of the many obstacles to it. The focus of chapters 19–34 is markedly different. Here Manton shares his own ruminations on the glory of God, the misery of sin, the beauty of the gospel, and the mystery of providence. Coupled with the hope of glory, these constitute the most enlivening truths in Scripture. Manton’s aim is to demonstrate what it looks like to meditate on these truths, thereby furnishing us with a template that we can easily employ in our practice of biblical meditation.

As you read this volume, I encourage you to be mindful of Manton’s assertion that biblical meditation is “not a thing of arbitrary concernment” but of “absolute

15. Sinclair Ferguson, *From the Mouth of God: Trusting, Reading, and Applying the Bible* (Banner of Truth, 2014), 159.

16. This volume is an abridged edition of Manton’s *Sermons on Genesis 26:63*, in *Complete Works*, 17:263–348. This is a collection of ten sermons on the subject of biblical meditation. The conclusion is taken from *Psalms 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:65, 166–67; 7:271.

use.”¹⁷ When blessed by the Spirit of God, it spans the gap between the head and the heart, thereby producing experiential knowledge, which in turn is “the mother and nurse of godliness.”¹⁸ May the Lord bless this work to you for your good and His glory.

—J. Stephen Yuille

17. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 6:141.

18. Manton, *Psalm 119*, in *Complete Works*, 9:80.

Introduction

“And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening” (Gen. 24:63). Young people look on meditation as a dull and melancholy work, fit only for old age. Because they are eager and energetic, they focus more on actions than thoughts. They are so caught up with other people that they have no time to meditate. But Isaac, a young man, “went out to meditate in the field.” The word in the original language can be translated “meditate” or “pray.” It literally means “to mutter with a suppressed sound” or “to speak as between thoughts and words.” So the meaning is that Isaac went aside privately to converse with God about heavenly things.

The field speaks of privacy. Deep thoughts require seclusion. This is why many of David’s psalms were penned in the wilderness. Those who would enjoy God’s company must go aside from other company so that their mind, being sequestered from all distractions, may engage itself the more freely in heavenly thoughts. We have the most experience of God in this solitary

and heavenly retreat. Duties done in company are easier because people are watching, but meditation is difficult and tedious because it is a work of seclusion that receives approval only from our "Father who sees in secret" (Matt. 6:4, 6, 18).

The time of Isaac's meditation is also noteworthy. He went out "in the evening." All times of the day and night are the same to God. He takes no greater pleasure in six o'clock in the morning or nine o'clock in the evening. The important thing is that we take note when our soul is most fresh and lively. For some, this is the morning. For others, it is the evening. It is whenever our thoughts are more serious and solemn with God. As David says, "To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul" (Ps. 25:1). It is our duty to be faithful to our soul and to take advantage of the morning, afternoon, or evening as best suits us. David says, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). He describes the blessed man as one who delights "in the law of the LORD" and meditates on it "day and night" (Ps. 1:2).

Finally, it is important to observe that it was Isaac's comfort to meditate. Gracious hearts must have spiritual delights: the Word, prayer, and meditation. Job proclaims, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). David says, "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage" (Ps. 119:54). Christ declares, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John

4:34). It would be wonderful if we could turn duty into recreation and work into pleasure and if, at the close of the day, we could visit with God on the mount, walk with Him in the garden, and say with David, "May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD" (Ps. 104:34).

We can sum up Genesis 24:63 in a single statement: It is the duty of Christians to set apart some time and place for meditation, for exercising their souls in heavenly and holy things. We live in days of action and commotion; we think that we have so much to do and, as a result, too few of us desire to converse with God. For this reason, my purpose in this book is to press the duty of meditation.

CHAPTER 1

Kinds of Meditation

Before I can define meditation, I must distinguish between two kinds. The first is occasional meditation. It is an act by which the soul spiritualizes objects with which it is conversant. As it sees all things in God, so it sees God in all things. At the well, our Lord spoke of the water of life (John 4:14). At the supper, He spoke of eating bread in the kingdom of God (Luke 14:15). God trained Israel through types and ceremonies so that they could ascend to spiritual thoughts by means of common objects. And our Lord taught by parables and similitudes, taken from ordinary functions and offices, so that we might engage in our earthly business with a heavenly mind. Whether in the shop or the field, we should think of Christ and heavenly things. Our Lord spoke of merchants, farmers, soldiers, and servants. In all these similitudes He teaches us that we should think of God and heaven. Even a small grain of mustard seed can yield a spiritual application.

The second is set and solemn meditation. It has several parts. The first is reflexive. This is when a person converses with his own heart. "Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still" (Ps. 4:4). Of all the parts of meditation this is the most difficult, for here a person is to exercise dominion over his soul and to function as his own accuser and judge. Because it is contrary to self-love and carnal ease, the worldly person chokes his soul with business so that his thoughts do not (like a mill) grind on him. Some people pass their days in pleasure, thereby charming their soul into a deep sleep so that it does not disturb them. It is necessary for a Christian to take some time to converse with himself and to ask himself some serious questions: Who am I? Where have I been? What have I done? What temptations have I experienced? How have I overcome them? We would think it strange if two men who conversed every day for fifty years did not know each other. Yet this is often the case between us and our soul. We live a long time in the world yet remain strangers to ourselves.

The second part of set and solemn meditation is directive. It consists of two sorts. The first is doctrinal. Here, we exercise ourselves in the doctrines of God's Word and consider how they may be useful to us. It differs from study in two ways. First, the object of study is something that is unknown in whole or in part, but meditation is the mind's return to something with which it is familiar. It is the pause of reason on something we

already know, or a call to remembrance something we already understand. Second, the end of study is information, but meditation is chiefly concerned with practice. "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it" (Josh. 1:8). Study is like a winter's sun that shines without warming. The fruit of study is to store up truth, but the fruit of meditation is to practice it.

The second sort of directive meditation is practical. We remove ourselves from worldly distractions so that we may study how to pursue a holy life with better success and advantage. We are to be wise in our manner of living. "He will guide his affairs with discretion" (Ps. 112:5), which implies foresight, choosing or devising our way. By this kind of meditation, godliness is made more prudent, reasonable, and orderly. Christians who live haphazardly find much toil in the holy life and are not half as useful as others. We should take care for the holy life, how we may be most useful to God, govern our relations with most advantage, fulfill our callings that they may not be a disadvantage to religion, and we should consider how particular duties may be the most resourcefully accomplished.

CHAPTER 2

A Definition

Meditation is the duty or exercise of religion whereby the mind is applied to the serious and solemn contemplation of spiritual things for practical uses and purposes. Scripture teaches us that it is a duty of religion: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night" (Josh. 1:8). It is a mark of a godly man: "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). It is commended in the practice and example of the saints: Isaac, Moses, and David.

God is Spirit, and He deserves spiritual worship as well as that which is performed by the body (John 4:24). The thoughts are the noblest offspring of the soul, and their solemn consecration is fit for God. The Old Testament calls mainly for meditation on the law. But the gospel directs us to a new object: the love of Christ. "That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width

and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge” (Eph. 3:17–19).

Meditation is a pure and rational converse with God; it is the flower and height of consecrated reason. It is a necessary duty, without which all graces (faith, hope, and love) wither. Faith will starve unless it is fed by continual meditation on God’s promises. “Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction” (Ps. 119:92). Thoughts fetch in food that refreshes the soul with the comfort of the promises.

Hope will not rise to a fullness of expectation unless we take a deliberate view of our privileges. “Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you” (Gen. 13:17). Our hopes arise according to the largeness of our thoughts. It is a great advantage to have our eyes open to see the riches of our inheritance and to have a distinct view of the hope of our calling. The apostle prays that the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened, that we “may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). People with barren thoughts usually have low hopes. Because we fail to rise up to gain a view of the land, our hearts sink within us. Certainly, hope thrives on the mount of meditation.

Love will not sparkle unless we engage the will with constant thoughts. Affection is nourished by apprehension, and the more constant and deliberate are our thoughts, the deeper is our love. Those who are backward

to the duty of meditation find none of those impulses of love that are in others. They do not endeavor to comprehend the height, breadth, length, and depth of Christ's love, and therefore their hearts are so narrow towards God.

Last, obedience will come and go like a flash of lightning if our thoughts are slight and vanishing. But deep meditation makes the fire burn brightly, and it keeps a constant beat and time in the heart.

CHAPTER 3

A Neglected Practice

Many people say that while meditation is a good help for those who can use it, it does not suit their temperament. I admit there is a difference among Christians. Some are more serious and consistent, and they have a greater command over their thoughts. Others possess a more weak and slight spirit, and they are less suited for duties of seclusion and recollection. But our unfitness is usually moral as opposed to natural, not so much a result of temperament but of disuse, and moral unfitness does not exempt us from our moral duty. Indisposition, which is a sin, does not disannul our engagement to God.

Neglect is one of the main causes why we are unfit to meditate. Many people consider meditation to be a great yoke, but practice would make it easy. The more we meditate, the more we will meditate. It is pleasant to those who use it. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). If we were accustomed to governing our thoughts, we would find them more obedient.

Another reason why we fail to meditate is a lack of love. Thoughts are at the service of love. We pause and focus on such objects as delight us. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). Love fastens the soul to the object (or thing) that is loved. We have no difficulty dwelling on carnal pleasures because our heart is there. But a carnal person cannot dwell on a solemn object because "the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (Eccl. 7:4). People usually complain that they lack the necessary temperament to meditate, but the truth is that they lack the heart. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:97). Objects that delight us will captivate our thoughts.

Some people enjoy a gift of utterance and readiness of expression in prayer. Others are more bound and restrained, but this is not an excuse for them to neglect prayer. We must perform our duties as we are able. God will hear the breathing and panting soul as well as the rolling tongue. The same is true of meditation. Some people can melt their souls in devotion and seclusion, while others can show their love better in zealous actions and public engagements for the glory of Christ. Though there is a diversity of gifts, we are all bound to the same duties, and though we are better suited for some over others, we must not neglect any in their order and course.

CHAPTER 4

Chief Among Duties

Meditation is a middle duty between reading or hearing God's Word and praying. The Word feeds meditation, and meditation feeds prayer. These duties must always go hand in hand; meditation must always follow the hearing or reading of the Word, and it must always precede prayer. Why?

First, it is unfruitful to hear the Word without meditating on it. We may hear and hear, but it is like putting our belongings in a bag filled with holes. "He who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes" (Hag. 1:6). "He is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (James 1:23–24). Merely hearing God's Word produces transient thoughts, and they only leave a weak impression, which is like the glance of a sunbeam on a wall. We never discern the beauty, luster, and order of biblical truths until we meditate on them. Then, we come clearly to see into the truth, and how it concerns us, and how it falls on our heart. "I

have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Ps. 119:99). The teacher delivers general theories and draws them down to practical inferences. But by meditation, we see more clearly and practically than those who teach. In outward learning, those who meditate most thrive best. Knowledge floats in the brain until it is pressed on the affections by deliberate thoughts.

Second, it is dangerous to meditate without hearing the Word. People will soon deceive themselves by their own thoughts. Fanatical spirits, who neglect the hearing of God's Word, claim to have dreams and revelations. Each of us has a heretic in our heart who will soon deceive without a treasure of knowledge. People will be vain in their imaginations unless their thoughts are corrected by an external light. They will be "dreamers" (Jude 8).

Third, it is rashness to pray without meditating on God's Word. What we take in by means of the Word we digest by meditation and express by prayer. These three duties must be so ordered that none of them usurps the others. People are dry and barren in their prayers for lack of exercising themselves in holy thoughts.

My heart is overflowing with a good theme;
I recite my composition concerning the King;
My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. (Ps. 45:1)

The heart yields matter to the tongue. We must not come to God in prayer until we have prepared our hearts

through mature deliberation. It is notable that, in Scripture, prayer is often called meditation because it is the product of it. "Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation" (Ps. 5:1). This implies that David's prayer was the expression of his deliberate thoughts. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD my strength and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14). Prayer is the vent of the thoughts.

We call to remembrance subjects that are of useful consideration: God, that we may fear Him; sin, that we may abhor it; the works of God, that we may glorify Him; and so on. "My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding" (Ps. 49:3). The end of such meditation is not to fill the head with notions, but to improve the heart. The proper use of this exercise is to set the mind on the great subjects of religion so as to work two things in the heart. First, a greater care for duty: "I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways" (Ps. 119:15). Second, a greater hatred of sin: "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Ps. 119:11).

CHAPTER 5

Profitable for the Mind

I come now to explain the profit of meditation. In brief, it is the mother and nurse of godliness because it assists the work of grace on the understanding, affections, and life.

It is a great advantage to the understanding because it helps us to grasp the doctrines of religion. How?

First, it gives us a clear sight of the doctrines of religion. We see the meaning, scope, and order of all points of religion when we meditate on them. Knowledge without meditation is but a hearsay knowledge. It means we have nothing but the apprehension of others. We repeat doctrine by rote, without any conviction and affection. We do not distinctly discern the worth and excellence of Christianity until we come to meditate on it. "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). Most people have never tasted the sweetness of Christ. Their bare apprehensions of what they have heard about Christ is but tradition, not true religion.

When we exercise our thoughts on Christ, then we see Him for ourselves. The sight of Him is clearer when it is fixed and steady. The beauty and excellence of religion is not discerned by a passing glance. When we meditate and thereby see that our Beloved is above all beloveds, then we admire Him. The Christian religion is not to be taken up by chance but by choice, not because we know no other but because we know no better. Our affection for religion will be more rational when our judgment has a clearer sight and trial.

Second, meditation helps us to retain the doctrines of religion. When we toss an apple back and forth in our hands, they begin to smell of the apple, even when it is gone. A constant light is a great friend to memory, and when we meditate on sermons, we remember them long after they are preached. We do not forget those friends whom we have entertained with any solemnity. Solemn and serious thoughts leave a charge on the memory.

Third, meditation ensures that the doctrines of religion are always present with us. All sins arise out of forgetfulness. "You have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons" (Heb. 12:5). It is a mighty advantage to have biblical truths at the ready when temptation assails us. This is the Holy Spirit's office. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). For our part, we must meditate on God's Word:

Bind them continually upon your heart;
Tie them around your neck.
When you roam, they will lead you;
When you sleep, they will keep you;
And when you awake, they will speak with you.
(Prov. 6:21–22)

Continual meditation makes religious thoughts actual and present.

CHAPTER 6

Profitable for the Affections

Meditation is also a great advantage to the work of grace on the affections. Ponderous thoughts are the bellows that kindle the affections. They inflame those latent sparks of grace that are in the soul. Impure thoughts stain the heart and convey filth to the soul. When the imagination is consumed with unclean objects, lust, revenge, and covetousness are kindled. The imaginations of the heart are evil, but good thoughts leave a forcible impression on the soul.

Deep thoughts leave Christ's wounds and sorrows on the heart. They crucify us. It is true morally as well as spiritually. The apostle Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). Certainly, experience teaches us that we are not affected by what we do not know. But serious meditation makes the object present and (as it were) sensible. Therefore, faith, which is a deep acting of the thoughts on the promises and the glory to come, is called "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of

things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It gives future blessedness a present subsistence in the soul, whereby it overwhelms us.

It is a principle in nature that appetite follows knowledge, and that desire is answerable to the clear judgment we have of an object's worth and dignity. It is not enough that the judgment is convinced only once; rather, it must remain fixed on the object, for things lose their virtue when we do not keep them in the eye of the soul. When the bird leaves her nest and is absent for a long time, the eggs grow cold and do not hatch. Likewise, our desires grow cold and dull without meditation.

Faith and hope are ripened by constant thoughts of God's grace, power, truth, goodness, and unchangeableness. "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Tim. 1:12). "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You" (Ps. 9:10)—that is, those who seriously consider God's name, for the Hebrew word means to consider. Those who know God—how merciful and powerful He is—will trust in Him.

Fear is sanctified when it is fed by the consideration of God's wrath and displeasure. "Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath" (Ps. 90:11)—that is, who does seriously consider it? God's wrath moves us according to the apprehensions of it that we form within ourselves.

Desire for Christ is fed through meditation. A serious consideration of His excellence ravishes the heart.

“His mouth is most sweet, yes, he is altogether lovely” (Song 5:16). Christ is enough to satisfy all our desires. The value of things is hidden when we do but slightly and superficially look on them, but when we meditate on them, they are far greater than what was seen at first glance. “That He would show you the secrets of wisdom! For they would double your prudence” (Job 11:6). By long use, the mind has been habituated to earthly objects and profits. For this reason, it must be raised to meditate on Christ’s excellencies so that He might become as natural an object to us as the world. The same is true for heaven. When we do not hold our hearts to the consideration of its glory, it does not work on us. Moses “looked to the reward” (Heb. 11:26). He had his eye on it. This denotes intentional consideration. We should consider it again and again and send our thoughts as spies into the land of promise, to bring us reports and tidings of it.

Sorrow for sin is produced by meditation. “My sin is always before me” (Ps. 51:3). “Surely, after my turning, I repented; and after I was instructed, I struck myself on the thigh; I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated, because I bore the reproach of my youth” (Jer. 31:19). When we deeply consider our errors and their seriousness, it produces sorrow in us.

Hatred of sin also arises from meditation. Evil affections are nourished by thoughts, and they are maintained in life and strength, for thoughts are the food of the soul. “But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death

in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" (Rom. 7:13). The sinfulness of sin appears by considering the purity of the law, the majesty of God, and the kindness of Christ.

Finally, joy and delight are fed by meditation, for it turns God's promises into food:

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow
and fatness,
And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.

When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches.
(Ps. 63:5–6)

"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8). The taste and relish of our thoughts are left on our affections.

CHAPTER 7

Profitable for Life

Finally, meditation is an advantage to the fruits of grace in the life. In short, it makes the heavenly life easier, sweeter, and wiser.

First, it makes it easier because it calls for the assistance of reason. Because of sin, reason serves the physical senses, and it is enslaved to worldly desires and appetites. But by meditation, it is employed in the highest and purest way. When reason is gained, which is the leading faculty, the work becomes much easier. Meditation puts reason in authority and rescues it from being governed by the physical senses. “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Now, the physical senses serve to furnish us with matter for meditation (Job 12:7–8). The air, sea, and earth give fuel for wisdom and spiritual advantage. “Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise” (Prov. 6:6).

Second, meditation makes the heavenly life sweeter. It does so by making the heavenly life more likeable to us. For worldly people, spiritual duty is irksome because they know nothing of the sweetness and blessedness of communion with God. “For Your lovingkindness is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth” (Ps. 26:3). This constrains us to pursue holiness. Other people merely attempt this work, but they fail to consider its fruit.

Third, meditation makes the heavenly life wiser and more orderly. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

In every spiritual duty, a Christian should have one principal aim—removing a doubt, relieving a need, mortifying a corruption, or receiving a grace. God usually comes in over and above our aims and expectations. He “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). We would have a lust subdued, and the Lord comes in with an overflow of comfort. We would have a doubt removed, and the Lord comes in with an increase of grace.

CHAPTER 8

Helpful Guidelines: Part 1

I will now give you some rules to guide you in this weighty business of the Christian life. First, our goal in meditation must be application:

Behold, this we have searched out;

It is true.

Hear it, and know for yourself. (Job 5:27)

In meditation our aim is to promote the good of our souls. When we speak with others, we aim at their good, but the purpose of meditation is our good. When we read God's Word, we bend the bow. When we apply biblical truths to ourselves, we let fly the arrow. When we work these truths on our hearts by way of reflection, we hit the bull's-eye.

By reflection, I mean trial. We ask ourselves, How is it with you? What is your condition? How are you doing? Having explained the doctrine of justification, the apostle Paul makes a practical application to his own

heart: "What then shall we say to these things?" (Rom. 8:31). In other words, How does this truth concern me?

By reflection, I also mean command. We charge ourselves to serve God with greater care. After meditating, we should arrive at a practical conclusion. For example, after David had meditated on God's providence in punishing the wicked, he declares, "It is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73:28). When he had meditated on God's mercy, he commands his soul to bless God:

Bless the LORD, all His works,
In all places of His dominion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul! (Ps. 103:22)

After meditating on God's power, he says,

May sinners be consumed from the earth,
And the wicked be no more.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!
Praise the LORD! (Ps. 104:35)

Second, when we meditate, we must not inquire further than God has revealed. Our thoughts must always be bound by God's Word. A fanatic is likely to abuse meditation. He soars too high because of his fleshly mind, and he intrudes himself into things that are none of his business (Col. 2:18). David says,

LORD, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.

Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me. (Ps. 131:1)

In spiritual exercises we keep our thoughts to what is revealed. "Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). Silly disputes feed curiosity, not religion. Those who soar too high fall far down before they are done.

Third, when we meditate on God, we must do so with great care and reverence. His perfections are a matter for admiration as opposed to inquiry. Some people dispute whether it is best to meditate on God's essence or not. As it is revealed to us in His attributes, it is very useful and comforting. "May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD" (Ps. 104:34). Though we should get as large thoughts as possible of God's majesty and power, we must not pry too curiously into His nature, lest we are oppressed by His glory. The mysteries of the Trinity are matters of belief rather than debate. God "alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:16).

He made darkness His secret place;
His canopy around Him was dark waters
And thick clouds of the skies. (Ps. 18:11)

God is said to dwell in light to show His majesty and to dwell in darkness to show His incomprehensibility.

Do not entangle yourself in an attempt to raise your zeal through meditation. The full knowledge of these things is our portion in heaven, not on earth.

Fourth, we must keep a spiritual purpose in mind when we meditate on common things. God has given us our mind to employ on earthly objects for spiritual purposes. "He has put eternity in their hearts" (Eccl. 3:11). The meaning is that He has endowed us with natural light to contemplate His handiwork. The mind is quick to grow vain and common. For this reason, we need greater care and watchfulness.

When I consider Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which
You have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
(Ps. 8:3-4)

Nature is a school to teach us religion. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). Philosophers study the creatures to find out their natural causes, but we study them to find causes to worship.

Fifth, we must be careful not to create a snare for our souls. Some sins are contagious, like fire in straw, and we cannot think of them without infection and temptation. Some thoughts may produce a secret delight, which may pass through us like lightning, and set us all on fire.

She multiplied her harlotry
In calling to remembrance the days of her youth,
When she had played the harlot in the land of
Egypt. (Ezek. 23:19)

Though the prophet speaks of spiritual fornication, there is a plain allusion to outward fornication. He describes an unchaste woman who feeds the fire of harlotry by remembering her vile lusts. Some temptations cannot be considered without sin. For example, an innocent thought may quickly degenerate into an unclean glance. It is for this reason that the apostle Paul warns that some sins must not even be named among us (Eph. 5:3).

CHAPTER 9

Helpful Guidelines: Part 2

In the previous chapter, I gave you five rules to guide you when engaged in meditation. Here I will add seven more.

First, we must meditate on what we need the most. When we do, we will find the most help, and the benefit will be most sensible. Seasonable thoughts have the greatest influence. The servants of God have sometimes meditated on His power, sometimes on His mercy, sometimes on His providence, according to their circumstances and temptations. “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You” (Ps. 56:3). In a time of fear, the psalmist thinks of why He should trust God. Whatever we meditate on, we must take heed of slughtness. Transient thoughts leave no impression.

Second, we must meditate on one thing at a time. Our thoughts should be wisely restrained. A skipping mind that wanders from one meditation to another profits little. Constant and fixed meditation works best. James speaks of the one “who looks into the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). That is, he bows down to take

a deliberate view. The same word is used to describe that narrow search which the angels use to discover the mysteries of salvation (1 Peter 1:12). There must be a deep sight and serious consideration. "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). She examined and compared them in her mind. Oftentimes, once we have apprehended something, our curiosity is satisfied. As a result, we begin to loath it, and so it loses its power and virtue. When digestion is hurried, there is little nourishment. Likewise, when meditation is not deep and ponderous, we have no lively perception and feeling of it in our hearts. A mere glance does not discover the value of anything. He who merely casts his eye on a piece of embroidery does not discover its art.

Third, we must not desist from meditation until we have found some profit, either sweet tastes of the love of God, or high affections towards God, or strong resolutions against sin.

Fourth, we must be thankful when God blesses us in meditation. Christians often forget to give the glory to God.

Let the peoples praise You, O God;

Let all the peoples praise You.

Then the earth shall yield her increase;

God, our own God, shall bless us. (Ps. 67:5-6)

As there is a natural access and recess between the rivers and the sea, so there is between blessings and praises:

Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips shall praise You.
Thus I will bless You while I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name. (Ps. 63:3–4)

We praise Him not only in our necessity, but at all times for His bountiful blessings.

Fifth, we must not bridle our free spirit with the rules of method. God calls for religion, not logic. When Christians confine themselves to rules and prescriptions, they straighten themselves, and their thoughts come from them like water out of a still, not like water out of a fountain. Voluntary meditations are most profitable.

Sixth, our success in meditation is not to be measured by the multitude and complexity of our thoughts, but by their sincerity. Many Christians disquiet themselves because they look too much at their gifts. We should covet the best gifts, but not inordinately. “Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts” (Ps. 51:6). In prayer, God looks more to the impulses of zeal than the flowers of rhetoric. So too in meditation.

Seventh, we must begin and end meditation with prayer. Spiritual duties are subservient to one another. When you begin to meditate, you must pray for a blessing, and at the end, you must commend your souls

and resolutions to God. David prays, "O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the heart of Your people, and fix their heart toward You" (1 Chron. 29:18). Our motions are fleeting and diminishing, and so God must preserve in us the resolution of consecrating ourselves and all that is ours to Him.

CHAPTER 10

Love of Ease

My work is now to handle the hindrances to meditation together with the helps that will quicken you in the performance of it. We must be content with our broken and imperfect attempts. It is enough that we can look upward and enjoy some glances of the hope of glory, and it is enough that we can be encouraged against despair.

The first hindrance to meditation is love of ease (or spiritual slothfulness). It is the condition of those who refuse to apply themselves to what is difficult. If grace would drop out of the clouds, or if God would be content with the cold expressions of a drowsy heart, then such people would be religious. But when duties involve effort and self-denial, they withdraw and hang back. Solomon says, "The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor" (Prov. 21:25). They want grace to perform what God requires, but they are unwilling to make any effort.

This is a great impediment to meditation because, of all spiritual duties, it is the most difficult and tedious to

the flesh. It is a duty that lies within the soul. We cannot so easily command our own thoughts. It is also a private duty of which God alone is conscious. In public duties, our interests and ends have a great constraint, and therefore we excite the heart to be more intent and serious. But when there is nothing to prompt them, many people either omit the work or turn it into a slight and idle practice. How can we shake off this spiritual sloth? We must take to heart the following truths.

First, a lazy spirit is unfit for Christianity. The Christian life involves much labor and diligence. Faith is a work (John 6:29). It is not an idle speculation, nor is it a naked apprehension. It is a matter of difficulty and diligence to bring Christ and the soul together and to lodge the soul in the heart of Christ. Love is also labor (Heb. 6:10). It is not a naked profession, but there is labor in it. This is true of love for God and love for others. Obedience too is expressed by a constant course of work and labor. In sum, religion is a constant exercise. There are no loiterers in heaven. God's work must not be done with a faint wish and a slack hand. People are mistaken if they think religion is a broad and easy way. The gate is narrow, the path is straight, and few find it. It is a work, not a sport or play. Many people flatter themselves with the expectation that they will go to heaven by taking a shortcut that costs them no effort.

Second, it is better to take pains than to suffer pains. "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts" (Ps.

119:45). You will never be freer than when you commit to God's service. It is so sad to see people who are prejudiced against those pains that yield freedom and comfort for the present and glory for the future. They take pains for what will bring them eternal pains. Such is the wretchedness of man that he accounts nothing toilsome but God's work and nothing pleasant but the fulfillment of his own lusts. Consider which is better—to labor for a season or suffer forever?

Third, there is nothing difficult in God's service that is not sweetened by God:

Many, O LORD my God, are Your
wonderful works
Which You have done;
And Your thoughts toward us
Cannot be recounted to You in order;
If I would declare and speak of them,
They are more than can be numbered. (Ps. 40:5)

“How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!” (Ps. 139:17). Oh, that He who is infinite should think of poor worms, and that He should design our salvation before the world began! The Lord Jesus Christ thought no danger too great, no suffering too hard, no work too difficult for our sakes. What a mercy is this!

Fourth, those who seek after God eventually find Him to be their comfort. A faint pursuit is the cause of discouragement. When a flint does not strike fire at first,

we strike again. "He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Prov. 10:4). It is a rule in grace as well as nature. Let us, therefore, press on until we have overcome the difficulty that is before us.

Fifth, a lazy heart must be urged forward with the greater insistence. When David was shy of God's presence, he commanded himself: "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'" (Ps. 32:5). His reason issues a decree and positive conclusion: "I said, 'I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue'" (Ps. 39:1). Likewise, we conclude that we should not keep away from God any longer but determine to go to Him.

CHAPTER 11

Love of Pleasure

Another hindrance to meditation is the love of pleasure. Those who pass their time in mirth are unwilling to be solemn and serious. When children's minds are set on playing, it is irksome for them to do schoolwork. So, when the heart is set on pleasure, it is hard to bring it to religious performances. How can we wean the soul from the love of pleasure?

First, we must consider that the love of pleasure is the gratification of the body rather than the soul. When our chief concern is to gratify our sensual part, we turn ourselves into animals. To eat, drink, sleep, and play is to do what animals do. A person's delight should be in the pure and free exercise of reason. If people would exercise themselves in this, they would find that the greatest delight would be in the contemplation of truth. "The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart" (Ps. 19:8). The gospel is a sublime and satisfying truth.

Second, we must consider that the sweetness of religious exercises is far better than that of carnal pleasures.

It is difficult to deny familiar delights because pleasure is natural to us. But we should consider that, by communion with God in spiritual exercises, delight is not abolished, but advanced to a more noble object. "May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LORD" (Ps. 104:34). We keep our affections but change their object. The pleasures of the world are but sugared attractions in which a man may soon lose himself. But you will find the same sweetness in God with less hazard and danger.

Third, we must choose to meditate on those things that are pleasant in order to allure the soul. All the objects of meditation are not dark and gloomy. There are some things pleasing to nature—the mystery of providence, the beauty of the creation, and the excellence of the gospel. And when we are not fit for the serious exercises of the closet, we may, as Isaac, go out into the field to meditate and heighten our imagination by pleasant objects.

When the soul is under the burden of guilt, we are unwilling to be alone and serious, lest the mind should fall on itself. Of all things, we desire to flee from our own company, and therefore meditation is an unpleasant duty. At such times, we can only think of God as a judge. A guilty conscience obliterates thoughts of God. It is said that "the demons believe—and tremble!" (James 2:19). Their thoughts of God impressed greater horror on them; therefore, they cried out, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29). Guilty men

experience these same horrors. They are “all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15). “Yet they say to God, ‘Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways’” (Job 21:14).

How can we remedy this? First, our conscience must be cleansed by the hearty application of the blood of Christ. Second, we should think of those things that might be a relief to the soul. When we are humbled for sin, a hope is set before us to which we may flee for refuge. “That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us” (Heb. 6:18). The wounded soul may ascend the mountains of myrrh and frankincense. “In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul” (Ps. 94:19).

CHAPTER 12

A Dull Heart

Another hindrance is a dull heart. The heart is oftentimes burdened and oppressed, and it sinks under its own weight so that it cannot be lifted up to holy duties, and so it is unfit for any exercise of religion. Our Savior bids His disciples to watch for this. "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life" (Luke 21:34). Cares and pleasures place a weight on the soul so that it cannot mount up to God in heavenly exercises. "Make the heart of this people dull" (Isa. 6:10). Here is a spiritual dullness and listlessness that is apt to seize on us. What can we do to cure this?

First, we must learn to exercise moderation in our use of earthly pleasures. In reference to prayer, the apostle Paul says we are to be "watchful" (Eph. 6:18). The same is true of meditation. We watch that we may always keep the soul in a fit condition for this duty. We order our affairs with great wisdom, that we may not force out so necessary a duty. When a person is encumbered with

business, there is no room left for such an exercise. If he lets his heart run disorderly all day, he will find that spiritual dullness seizes on him.

Second, we must keep the body in a fit frame, that it may not be a clog but an instrument. There is such a thing as the sanctification of the body. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23). The apostle Paul commands that "each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor" (1 Thess. 4:4). When we weaken our body's strength and spirits, it loses its fitness for meditation.

Third, we must not give way to a dull heart, but use constant exercise. When we give way to such indispositions, they prove to be utter bondage. Voluntary neglect is punished with penal hardness. As lying in the dirt will make us filthy, so we are hardened little by little through the deceitfulness of sin. The apostle speaks of those who "have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). All habits are increased by frequent acts. Long disuse makes the duty difficult. But the more we work, the more vigorous is the soul for the work of God.

Fourth, we must store up sanctified knowledge. "Every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt. 13:52).

Bind them continually upon your heart;
Tie them around your neck.
When you roam, they will lead you;
When you sleep, they will keep you;
And when you awake, they will speak with you.
(Prov. 6:21–22)

This is the way to make truths present and ready in our thoughts. When we have laid them up, we are better able to lay them out.

Fifth, we must think of our sins and corruption and the experiences of God to our soul.

For innumerable evils have surrounded me;
My iniquities have overtaken me,
so that I am not able to look up;
They are more than the hairs of my head;
Therefore my heart fails me. (Ps. 40:12)

If nothing else will come to hand, meditate on your present unfitness for any holy duty.

Sixth, we must season and affect our mind before meditation with some part of God's Word. Reading is a good preparative, and when we have taken in food, we may digest it.

CHAPTER 13

An Unruly Mind

An unruly mind that is prone to skip from thought to thought is another hindrance to meditation. Those who struggle with this cannot govern their affections or command their thoughts. What is the remedy?

First, when we meditate, we should exercise some restraint over ourselves. This is expressed in Scripture by the expression “gird up the loins” of our minds (1 Peter 1:13). This is an allusion to their hanging garments, which they tied up when they went to work so that they were contained. Similarly, we are to lay a command on ourselves.

Second, we must ask for the Holy Spirit’s help. “Unite my heart to fear Your name” (Ps. 86:11).

Third, we must dry up these swimming fancies with the flame of heavenly love. Love unites the heart and fixes it on its object. “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97).

Fourth, the course of our lives should be grave and serious. The mind follows the course of the life. We

flatter ourselves if we think we can command spiritual thoughts at a moment's notice when we have allowed our thoughts to wander. "Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth" (Prov. 17:24).

Fifth, we must watch for the first diversion and see it as an intrusion that breaks the ranks. On occasion, the devil injects good thoughts that he might divert our other thoughts. Hence, we must charge our thoughts that they may not disturb our meditation.

I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem...
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases. (Song 3:5)

Sixth, when we meditate in God's presence, we must not bring the world with us but purge ourselves of all carnal affections. "Their hearts pursue their own gain" (Ezek. 33:31). We must always remember that the prevailing lust will captivate the thoughts. To a distracted mind, no place is a solitude; the very closet is a marketplace. Therefore, before meditation, we should purge our hearts of worldly affections.

CHAPTER 14

Spiritual Barrenness

Spiritual barrenness is the final hindrance. It is a great trouble to Christians when their understandings are unfruitful and they cannot enlarge themselves in pertinent and necessary thoughts. How will we get our hearts to be fruitful in holy thoughts? There must be a solemn preparation for this service. Spiritual dispositions do not come upon us all of a sudden. Christians are deceived when they look for sudden and attentive motions of the soul. We must take time to remove our shoes when we enter upon holy ground to converse with God in so sweet a service. We must lay aside all distractions and not come reeking from the world into God's presence. There must be a time to raise the soul into a zealous height and eagerness. There must be a blowing of the fire, for your thoughts are to flame out in great and raised ascents. When the heart is thus prepared, how will we keep it from roaming?

First, we need to stand in an awe of God. This is done by laboring to have deep apprehensions of His

presence. Strong affections, especially fear, lock up the mind and do not suffer it to move abroad. Fear is proper to this duty because of the excellent mysteries by which God approaches us. When Jacob caught a sight of God, he said, "How awesome is this place!" (Gen. 28:17). And the psalmist says, "O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places" (Ps. 68:35). Mixed affections do best in the sweetest worship. "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11). "They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days" (Hos. 3:5). We are to have thoughts of God's holiness and goodness, and therefore we should fear Him, lest we forget that we are but poor guilty creatures. Fear confines the soul and does not allow it to run abroad.

Second, we must chide our heart for its vain excursions. Christians would have more command over their hearts if they would hold the reins a little tighter. We are not so sensible of the idle roving of the brain because it does not directly carry us to evil, but it does make us neglect the good. Did I come here to think of anything but Christ and heaven? Did I come to think of news, business, and lust? Christ chided His disciples, "What! Could you not watch with Me one hour?" (Matt. 26:40). And so we should chide our heart. Can I not keep my heart free for God for a little while? Certainly, if we would chide ourselves, the heart would not steal so many glances. Our hearts do not usually steal away; rather,

we let them go. God gave us reason to command our thoughts, and we should exercise it more than we do.

Third, we must call on the Holy Spirit for help:

Awake, O north wind,
And come, O south!
Blow upon my garden,
That its spices may flow out. (Song 4:16)

We ask God to breathe on the soul with a fresh wind. We ask Him to take a coal from His altar so that the incense might burn bright. “‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45).

Fourth, we must call on our hearts. It is a mistake to think that we are to call only on God. We are also to call on ourselves and deal with our souls by way of quickening:

Awake, my glory!
Awake, lute and harp!
I will awaken the dawn. (Ps. 57:8)

We charge our souls to awake to the consideration of heavenly mysteries. We speak to our hearts as David lays a charge on himself: “Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!” (Ps. 103:1). The children of God are to speak to themselves: “O, my drowsy heart! How coldly do you think of Christ! Such a dead heart is unbecoming to the service of the living God!”

Far too often, we content ourselves with a few careless glances and lazy, barren thoughts. To remedy this, we must consider that God requires not only affection but a height of affection, a holy ardor and earnestness, a raised spirit. God requires such thoughts as will comfort, revive, and quicken our souls. He requires such thoughts as end in affection.

CHAPTER 15

Contemplation

Writers of devotion usually distinguish between consideration, meditation, and contemplation. Consideration is thinking on a truth and pondering it in the understanding and memory. Meditation is enforcing a truth on the soul by discourse or pressing arguments. Contemplation is a supernatural elevation of the mind by which it adheres to God and pauses in the sight of God without any discourse. The soul is dazzled with the majesty of God or the glory of heaven, and it is transported into a present joy. In this condition, the use of reason is suspended for a time, and the soul is cast into a kind of sleep and quietness of intuition, gazing on the divine excellence. In short, contemplation is a ravishing sight without the work of reason, whereby the soul is raised into the highest way of apprehension.

The apostle Paul had such an experience. The glory of God was presented to him. He did not merely think on these things by the apprehensions of the mind, nor did he discourse about these things by the enforcement

of reason. Rather, he had a steady view or sight of these things, and it ravished his soul from his body.

But should Christians today expect to experience anything like this? In ancient times such raptures were more common. John, Peter, and Paul experienced them (Rev. 1:10; Acts 10:10; 2 Cor. 12:2, respectively). Whether these experiences were framed by way of representation to the soul or the soul was for a time separated from the body and transported to heaven is difficult to determine. Such experiences may still occur today but not in the same height and manner that the apostles enjoyed. God may still do it, for He is left to the liberty and sovereignty of His own dispensations. Though the beatific vision is the happiness of the next world, God may in some measure begin it here, that His children may enter into their inheritance by degrees. God may give us in this world not only those more temperate enjoyments of peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, but He may lead us into the suburbs of heaven and put us above the clouds into the glory of the world to come.

But if God were to do this, it would not be in the same manner that the apostles enjoyed it, for that was peculiar to them. When the apostle Paul reported his rapture, he pleaded that he had the sign of an apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). With these raptures, there was a concomitant revelation of the will of God, and they were revelations for the great ends of the gospel. The purpose of John's rapture was to receive the visions of God for the

comfort of the churches. The purpose of Peter's was to commission him to go to the Gentiles. The purpose of Paul's was to commission him as an apostle. Therefore, though God may impart such raptures (for we do not know what He may do out of His sovereignty), He does not do so in the same way or for the same end.

The raptures and transportations that the children of God now feel sometimes proceed from strong pangs and ecstasies of love, which for a while suspend the distinct use of reason and cast the soul into a quiet gaze. When love is moderate, it expresses itself in thoughts and words, and it is a great help to make the inward sense more acute and sharp. But when love is vehement and strong, it is content with itself, and it is satisfied with its own heat, ardor, and intensity. Therefore, there is not such a distinct discourse.

When a man hugs a friend, the closer he hugs him, the less distinctly he sees him. So too in the embraces of love. When the soul falls into the arms of Christ and clasps about Him with the arms of love, it hinders the distinct exercise of reason and the offices of discourse by which the soul would otherwise reflect on Him. The soul that thirsts after Christ pleases itself in the consideration of His beauty and perfection and dwells on Him with religious thoughts. But if joy grows very strong and is heightened to the utmost degree, it shuts the eyes of our souls, whereby we please only ourselves in a more intimate feeling and in the sweetness of our embraces. Great

and high affections hinder the use of reason because all our strength and vigor run into one faculty.

In the height of meditation, when the soul has been spent in that work, God gives in this silence the steady contemplation of His love and glory, and the mind, being inflamed and heightened with spiritual thoughts and exercises, suffers a kind of transportation. It is very notable that those ravishments that were between Christ and the spouse were in the palm tree.

I said, "I will go up to the palm tree,
I will take hold of its branches."
Let now your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
The fragrance of your breath like apples.
(Song 7:8)

Christ would satisfy Himself with the church's breasts, and she would be satisfied with His love. The palm tree has a long, naked bark and carries all its leaves, branches, and fruits upward. It notes the religious ascent of the soul in spiritual exercises, when the thoughts do not run out in lower branches, in earthly thoughts and carnal distractions. In the top of the palm tree, we taste the sweetness of Christ, and the soul is ravished and spiritually made drunk with the clusters of His grapes.

These experiences, when God sees fit to give them, are imparted to persons of much holiness and religion. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Those bright souls are more fit to enjoy the

sight of God. When by constant and daily exercise the heart has been subdued to a religious frame, the Lord may then give those ravishing sweets, whereby they gaze on His beauty and glory. There are degrees in the sense of God's love.

These rich experiences are very fleeting and vanishing, and they are bestowed but now and then. We have not such high experiences at the command of our own endeavors. God gives them when He sees fit, and when He pleases, they pass away. Our present state is not capable of enduring these transports for long. The soul is not extended and enlarged to such a capacity, nor is the body qualified. Such contemplation is our portion in heaven, when sin and weakness are done away and when we have that which the apostle calls a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44), that is, a body fit for high communications and the continual presence of God.

Such ravishing experiences are not to be sought but referred to the good pleasure of God. We cannot pray for them in faith because we have no promise of them, and we must not be too hasty to eat of the fruits of paradise before our time. It is enough for us to go to heaven in the usual way. If God casts them on our endeavors, we should be thankful. But in meditation, we must mind those enjoyments which are more temperate and leave other things to God. It is good to content ourselves with grace, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. We must not tempt God with immodest requests and expectations

but sit down humbly and quietly. These experiences are not to be ranked among duties, but enjoyments. We will not be called to an account for a lack of them, for we are not obliged to pursue them. They are acts of God's magnificence and indulgence to the soul. Many times, Christians oppress their souls by their indiscreet aims. It is good to keep an even hand, that we may not vex ourselves with the disappointment of a rash and foolish expectation. Some are altogether careless and content themselves with any frame of spirit in worship, while others are not satisfied but with ecstatic motions. When we are careless, there is no melody made to God, but if we are too high strained, then the soul is oppressed with its own aims and the pursuit of things above our reach. The temperate, middle way should be our aim.

We should be careful to watch our hearts because many times we delude ourselves. Our raptures are nothing more than the assumptions of a troubled imagination or the delusions by which Satan abuses an overcredulous and superstitious soul. The extravagances of a wild zeal might seem like rapture. But we must always observe their end and scope. If they end in pride and prove to be a temptation, they are from the devil and not from God. Experiences from God enlarge our hearts for service and make us humbler. If it tends to make us neglect piety and duties, it is against the nature of religion, which presses us to wait on God with the more encouragement because we have already discerned His beauty and glory.

CHAPTER 16

The Time of Meditation

In general, we should meditate every day. Infrequent converse produces a strangeness to God and an unfitness for this duty. "His delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night" (Ps. 1:2). At the very least, we should take all convenient occasions to meditate.

As for the particular time of day we should meditate, it is arbitrary. We may do it in the silence of the night when God has drawn a curtain of darkness between us and the things of the world, or in the freshness of the morning or evening when the wildness and vanity of the mind is spent in worldly business. That said, there are some special times when the duty is most in season.

First, we should meditate after hearing a sermon. When God's Word falls on us with a full stroke, it is good to follow the blow. When God has cast seed into the heart, we must not let the birds snatch it away (Matt. 13:19). Many sermons are lost because they are not pressed on the thoughts. "For if anyone is a hearer

of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was" (James 1:23–24). "When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left Him and went their way" (Matt. 22:22). We should roll the Word in our thoughts and deeply consider it.

Second, we should meditate before solemn duties. Meditation is (as it were) the breathing of the soul, for it is a good preparative to raise the spirit into a frame of piety and religion. When the harp is tuned, it makes the music better. So, when the heart is fixed and settled by a preparative meditation, it is fitter to make melody to God in worship.

Third, we should meditate when God especially revives and enables the spirit. It is good to take advantage of such seasons. These impulses are a good indication from God that now is an acceptable time.

As for how much time we should spend in meditation, it is left to our discretion. We must not yield to spiritual laziness, nor should we cause spiritual weariness. The devil will take advantage of both. For this reason, we do not end meditation until we find profit, and we do not press too hard on the soul, thereby oppressing it with an indiscreet zeal. It is Satan's strategy to make you extend it to a tedious and unnecessary length.

It is good to bind the heart to some specific time each day yet leave it to such liberty as becomes the

gospel. The heart must not be loose and arbitrary. When it is engaged, it goes to work more thoroughly. Therefore, the Lord asks, "Who is this who pledged his heart to approach Me?" (Jer. 30:21). It is good to lay an obligation on the heart, but I do not advise you to bind yourself to any duty lest you create a snare. Though people should resist distractions in meditation, some business is unavoidable. When people have committed themselves to a duty and bound themselves in chains of their own making, their conscience will fall on them and dog them with restless accusations when they cannot accomplish the duty as they have prescribed for themselves. And besides, when hours are too fixed and customary, the heart often grows formal and superstitious.

CHAPTER 17

The Object of Meditation

My work is now to speak of the object of meditation. For the choice of the object, I do not need to press you to choose that which is seasonable and suits your own case. A sermon works more forcibly when it is suitable; so do thoughts when they are seasonable. "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul" (Ps. 94:19). It was to his advantage to exercise himself in seasonable comforts, like a shower of rain on a freshly mown lawn. "We do not lose heart," says the apostle Paul, "while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:16–18). In this way, we revive our Christian hopes. And, therefore, the needs of the soul must be served. To eat food when we are thirsty frustrates rather than satisfies. It is not enough to consider what is good but what is seasonable. Truths which are out of order and place do not nourish the heart but oppress it. It does no good to talk of hell and the severity of God's judgment to those who are

dejected. When the back is ready to break, we do not lay on a greater load.

Here are two important rules for choosing an object for meditation.

First, we must choose subjects that are profitable. Some are more speculative, others more practical. There are speculative subjects revealed in God's Word that are useful and profitable, such as the fall of angels, the order of providence, and so on. The heart may distill matters of practical use and profit out of these. All the benefit we receive from these truths lies in meditating on them. But there are other truths that are entirely practical. These should be our first choice because they are bread to the soul. Those who chase after fancies misemploy their thoughts and do not produce good bread for nourishment. That is why simple Christians often excel those with the best gifts who spend their time in obscure inquiries. The soul is diseased if it is only fed with fine notions because these do not provide nourishment. Those considerations that are weighty and solid convince most soundly and work most deeply. "Wisdom enters your heart" (Prov. 2:10). The Christian should never satisfy himself with speculations but employ his thoughts on practical matters to promote holiness in his life.

Second, we must choose subjects in an orderly and appropriate way. It is necessary to prescribe ourselves a course so that we may know our work and may not lose time seeking a subject and determining how to work on it. Furthermore, things work best when they follow

a method. It is an excellent advantage when things are appropriately suited and ranked in their order. We will find an advantage when we proceed from plain and obvious matters to those that are more complex. There are shallows for the lambs of God, and there are deeps for those of higher stature. We must pass from the most obvious matters of Christianity to those that are of more sublime consideration. The rise of the sun is low at first, and it illumines the eastern parts, and then it rises higher to the top of the heavens. So, before we search the depths of the Holy Spirit, it is good to begin with the knowledge of ourselves. Christ says, "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?" (John 3:12). Christ trained His disciples this way. First, He begins with plain matters. "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). There were greater mysteries above the reach of their present capacity. So, the apostle Paul speaks of wisdom for those who are perfect. "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature" (1 Cor. 2:6), that is, for those who have made some progress in religion. They are "mature," not absolutely, but in comparison to babes and novices.

Though we must follow a method and course, there must be liberty left for things for all seasons and occasions. I will mention four.

The first is forcible sermons. It is not good to lose the heat that we have gained from God's Word. When we

hear the Word preached, we eat it. But when we meditate on it, we digest it thereby turning it into nourishment.

The second is present impulses. Many times, Christ comes "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills" (Song 2:8). He causes holy thoughts to enter our minds by representing our unworthiness, coldness, and deadness, or else by representing the beauty and loveliness of grace. It is good that such thoughts should take the next turn, and our method must give way to God's work.

The third is remarkable providences. When God casts us on such objects as stir up special reverence or on creatures that discover His wisdom and glory or on a sudden death of someone near to us, it is excellent to consider it. These are things that must not be passed over without some consideration, and then God calls us off from our usual thoughts.

The fourth is the present requirement of the Holy Spirit. When rain comes seasonably, it refreshes the grass and causes it to grow. Otherwise, it would be burnt up with the drought and heat of the season. So, the soul would be parched with a temptation if it were not watered with seasonable thoughts.

CHAPTER 18

The Method of Meditation

What method should we use? For those who are just beginning this duty, it is best to give some thought to its nature, use, and excellence. This is a good preparative to the whole work. I direct you to it because it will lay a charge on the soul. It is also important to consider the motives for meditation. These will quicken you to the duty. When you have done everything, you should pray, "O Lord, help me, and keep this up in the thoughts of your servant!"

For the general method, it is good to follow God's order. "When [the Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). And so we begin with sin, which is more familiar to the understanding. It is good to lay the foundation of all in the way of mortification. Next, we proceed to righteousness. After the extermination of sin, we will be better prepared to entertain the love of God. Last, we go to judgment.

Another method is as follows. First, we consider the great end of man, that we may understand ourselves; then the evil of sin, that we may bemoan it; then the miseries of the world, that we may condemn it; then the horrors of death, the severity of judgment, and the torment of hell, that we may avoid it; then the excellencies of Christ, the privileges of the godly, the beauty of the gospel; then providence, heaven, God's power, wisdom, eternity, and so on, with suitable Scriptures for each of these.

As for how you should work on these objects, observe the following.

First, there must be persuasive thoughts. Deep consideration begins the work. You must set your hearts to consider the subject, for when the heart is once set, these thoughts, through the blessing of God, will come in freely. When the heart is set for prayer, God comes in with a great enlargement. So, when the heart is set to consider, you will have serious and solemn thoughts. If vain thoughts trouble you, set your heart to go on. If you quarrel with every vain thought, you will lose your purpose.

Second, there must be serious enforcements. Truths are impressed on the soul by means of lively reasons. Fishermen cast their net again and again. You must do the same, casting reason on reason, enforcement on enforcement, until you bring up treasure. There are four rational enforcements.

Arguments

The most common arguments are causes and effects. By the one, knowledge is increased, and by the other, affections are stirred. Choose such arguments as are evident and strong. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). A good man should be able to bring forth good arguments, that he might bring his heart powerfully to the acknowledgment of the will of God.

Similitudes

Heaven speaks to us in the dialect of earth. Heavenly mysteries are clothed with a fleshly notion. In the Song of Solomon, communion with Christ is set forth by banquets and marriages, and spiritual things are represented by corporal sweetness. In other places of Scripture, the Word of God is represented by a glass and the wrath of God by a fire. Now, such similitudes have a great force on the soul because they help apprehension. There is a picture for the thoughts to gaze on. By similitudes, we come to understand a spiritual thing that we do not know because it is represented by sensible things with which we are familiar.

Comparisons

When we compare things, opposites illustrate one another. For example, when we compare beauty and

deformity, deformity is more odious. If I were to meditate on the beauty of virtue, I would compare it with the filthiness of vice. Similarly, if I were to meditate on the pleasant path of wisdom, I would compare it with the filthy path of sin. We should compare earthly things with heavenly things. Our Savior teaches us to meditate by way of comparison. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). When we would shame ourselves for our disobedience, we may argue like this: all things obey the law of their Creator, the sun runs its race, the stars keep their course, and yet I leave the path God has set.

Colloquies and Soliloquies

The first are speeches with God, and the second are speeches with us. We must urge our hearts to action. If you have been meditating on the glorious salvation that was purchased by Christ, let this be your conclusion: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" (Heb. 2:3). If you have been meditating on the sinfulness of sin, examine your heart: "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (Rom. 6:21). If you have been meditating on hell and the wrath of God, speak to your heart: "Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you?" (Ezek. 22:14). If you have been meditating on your

sinfulness, you may turn on your heart: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you" (Mic. 6:8). If you have been meditating on the benefit of God's service and the danger of wandering from Him, you may say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now" (Hos. 2:7). If you have been meditating on the benefits of God to your soul, you may return on your heart by way of charge: "Return to your rest, O my soul, for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you" (Ps. 116:7).

Do this and be watchful that you do not lose what you have done.

CHAPTER 19

The Chief End of Man

I come now to the particular objects of meditation. I begin with the chief end of man. This is a necessary work, whereby we come to a knowledge of ourselves. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'" (Luke 15:17). When the prodigal son began to consider his condition, it resulted in better thoughts. So that we may come to ourselves, it is important that we consider the end for which God created us. Why do I live here? Am I here to acquire wealth or to know Christ? Am I here to wallow in pleasure or to pursue communion with God? Am I here to collect things that are perishable or to secure an everlasting estate?

When the end is rightly stated, people know their work and, as a result, they live up to the purpose of their creation. Most people know so many other things but are ignorant of themselves and, so, live carelessly to their own ruin. Their eyes are on the ends of the earth,

but they do not consider their soul. Others, for lack of considering the end of their lives, are so far from living as Christians that they scarce live like humans. Delight in the pleasures of this world transforms people into animals. It is their happiness to enjoy pleasure and gratify the body without remorse. Worldly pleasures cannot satisfy, and sinful pleasures are poison. Those who are allured by the pleasures of this world, which are lawful in themselves, pay for that which is not bread. And those whose food is to do evil feed on that which is rank poison. The world cannot satisfy, and sin will surely destroy. People thus deceive themselves and do not consider the end of their lives.

We must not only think of our last end but of our chief end. What should be the great aim of our lives before death comes? The fundamental difference between people is what they perceive to be their chief good and chief end.

In explaining this meditation, I will follow a method that is easy and obvious, not exceeding the capacity of the simplest. We should begin by propounding certain truths to our thoughts.

First, we were made for some end. All God's works serve to reveal His glory. "The LORD has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom" (Prov. 16:4). God has no other end but His glory, for the end must be more valuable than the means, something better and above all created things. If God made all things

for Himself, then man, who was the visible masterpiece of His creation, must be the sum of all God's other works. The apostle declares, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). All things are of Him as the Creator, through Him as the Preserver, and to Him (that is, to His glory). All things are from Him as the first cause and to Him as the last end. The whole creation was for man's use, and man was for God's glory:

When I consider Your heavens, the work
of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You
have ordained,
What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
(Ps. 8:3-4)

He was God's vicegerent, created to enjoy the comfort of other creatures and to exercise dominion over them. The whole world was man's palace, arched with heaven and floored with earth, and he was to be faithful to his Maker and give Him the tribute of His glory and praise. Therefore, if the heavens declare the glory of God, much more should man, who was furnished with a greater capacity suited to this purpose. He "has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true" (1 John 5:20). Certainly, God made man for a high purpose, even for Himself. This end is to enjoy and glorify God. To enjoy God is man's happiness, and to glorify

God is man's work. By glorifying God, he comes to enjoy Him, and he enjoys Him that he may glorify Him. In this way, he differs from other creatures. They were made only to glorify Him, not to enjoy Him, but man was made to glorify Him and enjoy Him.

Second, we were made to enjoy God. We were made for Him, and we are not quiet until we enjoy Him. By nature, man gropes after an eternal good (Acts 17:27). Everyone is searching for something that will satisfy them. There are some obscure instincts, having escaped the ruins of the fall, which tell us that God is our chief good and therefore must be our utmost end. God is the center of the soul, the place of the soul's rest. We should see that He alone can make us happy. Why would we turn elsewhere? It is against grace and nature. There is a principle in nature by which all creatures aim at their own satisfaction. All my comfort lies in enjoying God in Christ. Those who can satisfy their souls with the world are animals; those who can satisfy their souls with sin are devils. People are out of place, tossed to and fro, until they return to God. The faculties of the soul are misplaced and like a bone out of joint.

Third, we were made to glorify God. The creatures do it necessarily, but we must do it voluntarily. This must be the care of our hearts in every business. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Common actions, such as eating and drinking, must be done for godly reasons.

In our callings and duties, all must be done for the glory of the great God. All things must be measured by this rule and give place to this great end—namely, how we may glorify God at work, at home, in private, in public, and so on. I am to enjoy God and be serviceable to His glory. This is to make religion our work, not our play and recreation.

In every enjoyment, we should seek to glorify God. We can desire an estate but only if we desire to use it to God's honor. As God should be at the end of every business, so He should be at the end of every enjoyment. It is a mistake to think that spiritual blessings are only to be desired for themselves. We must desire the pardon of our sins not merely for itself but that God may be glorified in it. We must desire grace not only that we might be saved but that God may be glorified in our salvation (Eph. 1:6). In the work of redemption, Christ did not please Himself but aimed at His Father's glory. "For even Christ did not please Himself" (Rom. 15:3). Likewise, we should not merely please ourselves in the consideration of our own happiness but rejoice in it because God is glorified in pardoning our sin and giving us grace and salvation. Though it is difficult, it is a necessary piece of self-denial to desire salvation in subordination to God's glory.

CHAPTER 20

Enjoying and Glorifying God

Having established man's chief end, we are now to consider how we are to meditate on it to the glory of God. Every end is obtained by appropriate means, and God has ordained both the end and the means of meditation. The whole duty of man is to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Eccl. 12:13). Obedience respects the rule and fear the principle. In the Old Testament, fear is represented as the great principle of duty and worship. It corresponds to love in the New Testament. "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). The meaning is that God requires obedience out of a holy and upright principle. He has given a moral law to us, and we must observe it by love and fear. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Having ordained both the end and the means, God has given us a rule to guide us in serving His glory.

More particularly, a Christian is to be wise in the course of his employments; that is, he is to manage a holy life by a wise foresight (Luke 16:8). If my end is to enjoy God and glorify Him, how will I order my life so as to maintain communion with Him and promote His glory? What will I do for God at home and work? How will I serve the great end of my creation and promote the glory of God? Such foresights make the holy life one of care and choice, not merely of chance. We manage and guide our lives with discretion for the glory of God.

In such meditation, we must dispute with our souls so that we may win them from inferior objects which divert us from seeking the great end of our lives — glorifying and enjoying God. We must use persuasive reasons to debate with ourselves as to why we would focus on other things when our chief end is to enjoy God.

Only God Is Suitable

Other things cannot impart contentment to the soul. “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isa. 55:2). Why would I lavish away my best on things that do me no good? A person may be weary of life itself, and it may be a burden to him, but he never wearies of the love of God. You have never heard anyone complain of too much communion with God. Heavenly comforts are more lovely when they are obtained than when they are desired. Worldly things cannot satisfy the affections.

A person's heart consists of unlimited desires because it was made for God and cannot be quiet until it enjoys God.

Only God Is Eternal

Other things are not eternal. An immortal soul must enjoy an eternal good. It is the greatest misery to outlive our happiness. We have a soul that will never perish, and so why would we labor after things that perish? When they are gone, our affection for them will increase our affliction. We will be more troubled because we loved them too much. "I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Eccl. 1:14). That which is vain will vex the soul with disappointment. We can enjoy nothing with contentment but what we enjoy with security. "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field" (Isa. 40:6). Things that are an uncertain enjoyment cannot give the soul any quiet.

Only God Is Exceptional

Other things are inferior to the soul. They suit our outward part and serve the conveniences of the body. But that which makes a person happy must be greater than him and better than him. One soul is more worth than a whole world. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). God thought our souls to be worthy of the blood of Christ,

and we should recognize that they are too worthy to be prostituted to the world. People do not know the worth of a soul until they are about to die, and then they would give anything in exchange for their soul, to redeem their soul from destruction.

For what is the hope of the hypocrite,
Though he may gain much,
If God takes away his life? (Job 27:8)

When God comes to take away your soul, you will see that a lost soul cannot be redeemed for any price. Do not debase your soul! Why will you wed your soul, which is of a heavenly origin, to outward things?

Only God Is Dependable

Other things that we think will increase our happiness lead to trouble. First, they can lead to outward trouble. The more we are endowed with any excellence in the world, the more we experience sorrows and encumbrances. Those who have been most famous for outward qualities have come to a dismal end, as Sampson for strength, Saul for stature, Absalom for beauty, Ahithophel for counsel, and Nabal for wealth. The wheel of providence has rolled on them, and they have come to a sad end.

Second, things can lead to inward trouble. Oftentimes, outward blessings are salted with a curse. We never have outward things as a blessing until we have a higher interest in them. Those who have an interest in

God can rest quietly in His providence, and outward comforts are given as a blessing when they are additions and appendices to the covenant of grace. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). But when people encumber themselves with the world, there is a snare on the conscience, and they cannot enjoy the comfort of their condition. It will add to our inward trouble when God is neglected and the world is sought.

Third, they can lead to eternal trouble. We hazard the loss of eternal things for temporal things. Whenever we depart from God for a fleeting shadow, we lose an eternal joy. The comfort of the world is only for a time, but our punishment is forever. Why would we look after those things that we cannot enjoy forever and so wound our souls forever? An immoderate seeking after temporal things will be our eternal ruin. Will I overturn the quietness of my life? Will I trouble my conscience? Will I contract guilt and terror for the time to come for that which will ultimately perish? Let us leave things that perish to people who perish! Will I venture my soul on so vain a pursuit? Will I lose eternal glory for a little vainglory? Will I make my children rich yet be poor for all eternity? Will I bereave my soul of all hopes and joys which God has provided for those who love Him for a possession that is so uncertain and so ensnaring?

CHAPTER 21

Eternal Delight

We are considering how we are to meditate on man's chief end—enjoying and glorifying God. In addition to employing arguments (see the previous chapter), we must use similitudes, comparisons, colloquies, and soliloquies.

Similitudes

God's Word provides many important similitudes. For example, who would dwell in a ditch when he might enjoy a large house in a city? Who would feed on husks when he might have treasure? Who would choose the company of harlots when he might have a beautiful bride? Who would sit on stairs when he might sit on the throne? Likewise, who would think it his happiness to enjoy the world when he might enjoy God in Christ?

Comparisons

We should compare the world with heaven. Here we have but a foretaste of heaven, and this present

enjoyment is sweeter than all the honors and riches in the world. What are earthly pleasures in comparison to the joy of the Holy Spirit? Even if we possessed all earthly delights, they cannot yield perfect contentment. Solomon says, "Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, and the end of mirth may be grief" (Prov. 14:13). You will find that carnal delights always go awry and leave some sad impressions. God's worst is better than the world's best. The groans of the Holy Spirit are better than the joys of the world. The groans of God's Word never go away without leaving contentment and some drops of sweetness, but the joys of the world never go away without leaving clouds of sorrow. God's children rejoice amid their mourning, and a glory has risen on their souls even when they seem to be disconsolate in the eyes of the world.

Colloquies

These are speeches with God. We ought to complain that we have sinned and been ungrateful to Him. "I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You" (Ps. 73:22). I have chosen outward pleasure over communion with God, and I have preferred the contentment of the world over the delights of God's presence. Lord, I have traded with vanity and vexed myself in unprofitable pursuits. I have lived so long in the world and have scarce minded the reason I was sent into the world. In addition, we ought to give thanks if the Lord has taught us

better. "I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel" (Ps. 16:7). There were some obscure instincts to sway me to happiness in general, but I would have groped for the door of grace, without finding it, if God had not given me counsel. If I were left to the counsels of my heart, what would become of me?

Soliloquies

These are speeches with us. We should reprove ourselves for our former errors and follies. "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death" (Rom. 6:21). Why should I weaken my soul by stooping to such low pleasures? What have I received by turning away from God but a wounded conscience? We must charge our souls: I see it is best to cleave to God, I will choose God for my chief good and utmost end. I see that "it is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps. 73:28). When I was a child, I acted like a child. But now, it will be my care to enjoy communion with God, to be ruled by His Word, and to live for His glory. Those things which have intercepted the delight and contentment of my soul, I will leave them to the people of this world.

CHAPTER 22

The Sinfulness of Sin

I will now propose another subject for meditation: the sinfulness of sin. It is necessary for several reasons. First, it will humble us. We have low thoughts of sin, and therefore we are but slight in the matter of humiliation. Until we understand sufficiently the evil of our sin, we do not think it worthy of a tear or sigh. But when our understanding is opened, the heart is deeply affected.

I am weary with my groaning;
All night I make my bed swim;
I drench my couch with my tears. (Ps. 6:6)

We see such filthiness in sin that cannot be washed away without a deluge of sorrow.

Second, it will awaken us to a greater care and conscience. Who would engage in sin when we know and consider what it is? "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). The child who does not know the pain of being scalded will thrust his

fingers into the fire. People are bold in engaging in sin because they do not know the danger.

Third, it will urge us to come to Christ. No one looks to the brazen serpent unless they are stung. Likewise, no one regards salvation unless they have been stung with some remorse in their conscience for the great evil of sin. When the soul feels the weight and burden of sin, then it will come to Christ.

Fourth, it will cause us to loathe ourselves when we come into God's presence. Gracious people are the most self-abhorring. "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). Peter had such a sense of his sins that he says, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8).

I will give you some general rules and observations for meditating on the sinfulness of sin. First, only God perfectly knows the utmost evil of sin. There is a kind of infinity in sin because it is committed against an infinite object, and therefore a finite and limited understanding cannot conceive its evil. "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things" (1 John 3:20). Our heart does not suggest half the evil that is in sin, for the infinite God knows there is greater evil in it than we can conceive. What is our light to the eye of God? We are the guilty parties, and so we are inclined to be partial in our own cause. But God is the offended party, and therefore He can best judge the measure of the offense. Again, God's whole nature sets Him

against it. We have but a drop of indignation against sin, whereas God has an ocean. He is the greatest good and therefore truly sees what is evil. He sees greater evil in sin than any creature possibly can.

Second, man's knowledge of sin is clearer at some times than at others. When conscience is opened, there is a greater burden. David says,

For innumerable evils have surrounded me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am
not able to look up;
They are more than the hairs of my head;
Therefore my heart fails me. (Ps. 40:12)

Wicked people are in their element when they are in the heat of their sinful pursuit. They do not feel the burden of sin. Sometimes, when people are about to die, their conscience is touched, and they cry out on account of the burden of sin. "The sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:56). Then, their hearts are filled with despair. This makes death to be dreadful to the soul and keeps it in bondage. "Those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Heb. 2:15). Certainly, at the day of judgment, we will see its folly. Conscience will then be enlarged, and the sinner will remember the wickedness of his life. Then, all disguises will be laid aside. A little meditation and prayer for conviction at present would help us come to the same apprehensions. If conscience were extended now as it will be then, we would soon be weary of our lives.

Third, sins are not to be measured by their smallness but by the offense done to God. The first sin was but the eating of an apple. It would seem to be a small matter if we did not consider its offense against God. The greater is their impudence that they will dare God to His face for a trifle. The greater is their impudence that they will hazard their souls for a small thing. Sins that seem small have been overtaken by God's vengeance. Contempt for God is greater when we break with Him for a small matter and transgress His commandments on every light occasion.

Fourth, no one is exempt from bewailing the evil of sin. Though the children of God will never feel God's displeasure poured out on them, they must bewail the evil that is in sin. The merit of Christ does not change the nature of sin or lessen its evil. Why would we look on it with a different eye after conversion than we did before conversion? Sin is still damning in its own merit and nature, and it is still the violation of a holy and righteous law, and it is still an affront to the holy God. Sin is the same as it was before, though the person might not be the same.

Fifth, the children of God are not entirely exempt from the effects of sin. It is a disease, though not to death. Who does not groan under the heat of a fever, even if he is assured of life? Though the godly can never lose their right in the covenant, they may lose its enjoyment, and this is enough to make a child of God mourn.

Though the Lord has made them vessels of mercy, He does not use them as vessels of honor, but they are set aside as useless vessels. Sin will bring disgrace to religion and discomfort to our souls, and it will eclipse the light of God's countenance. Who can bear the loss of God's favor without sadness? "Are the consolations of God too small for you" (Job 15:11). Do you make so little reckoning of those rich comforts of the Holy Spirit? You cannot be damned, for there is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), but your pilgrimage may be made very uncomfortable. He who prizes communion with God would not lose the comfort of it for the least moment. Where is your love? Can you sin against mercy? The warm beams of God's mercy should melt the heart. "Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations" (Ezek. 36:31). As long as there is love in the heart, you can never lack an argument to represent the odiousness of sin. Where is your love to God if you do not hate sin? "You who love the LORD, hate evil!" (Ps. 97:10). Though your right in the covenant is safe, you should still be mindful of the evil of your own actions.

Sixth, imagination is a great instrument in the work of meditation, but it must be wisely ordered and guided. Sound conviction by God's blessing does the work. Lusts take the throne by turns, and our thoughts may fall with the greatest sense and feeling on our souls. It is good,

therefore, to bend the strength of our thoughts against our iniquity. It is good to fetch the aggravations of sin out of your heart. People look on matters of religion as abstracted ideas. Certainly, the simpler and more natural your thoughts are, the more work they will do.

CHAPTER 23

The Nature of Sin in Relation to God

Having made several observations in the previous chapter, I will give you a few arguments whereby you may come to understand the sinfulness of sin. The first argument is from its nature. Let us begin by considering the nature of sin in relation to God.

Forsaking God

Sin is a turning from the chief good to the chief evil. The very nature of sin is punishment enough. It is misery enough to depart from God, the center of rest and the fountain of life and blessing. It is a dishonor to God and a disadvantage to us. It is a dishonor to God to prefer the satisfaction of sin over the comforts of His presence, and yet this is at the root of every sin. They are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4). Every natural man loves the pleasure of sin more than communion with God. You are angry at Judas for betraying Christ and at the Jews for preferring Barabbas before Christ, yet you do the same thing every day. “Why does

your heart carry you away, and what do your eyes wink at" (Job 15:12). You forfeit the best things for the vilest, as children who part with a pearl for a nut.

Sin is preferring the devil before God. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do" (John 8:44). Will you gratify the devil and displease God? You will find him to be a terrible master. He who now tempts you will later accuse you. When the tempter becomes an accuser, you will know what it is to turn from God and to prefer the devil before a Savior. It is a great disadvantage to you for you to turn your back on your own happiness. Sin will make you shy away from God's presence. He will have no communion with you or you with Him. It is the comfort of God's children, whatever befalls them in this world, that they can go in secret and pour out their tears to Him. But now, God will turn away from you. He is the center of your rest and the God of your mercies. To whom will you then bring your burdens? "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). They separate you from God and God from you. O, you need to reason with yourself! Will I commit that which will rob me of communion with God? Sin has always been accompanied by a casting out from God's presence. It cast the angels out of heaven, where God is present in a glorious manner. It cast Adam out of paradise, where God was present by His own image. And it

cast Cain out from the people of God, where God was present in His worship.

Hating God

Sin is not only a turning from God but a turning against God. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). The more the heart is set on sin, the more it hates God formally and virtually. The soul hates God as lawgiver because He establishes a restraint between us and our carnal desires. "And you...were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works" (Col. 1:21). Because our minds were set on wicked works, we were annoyed that God would restrain our desires. We could not endure that someone would restrain the exercise of our carnal affections.

Now, this enmity is mutual. God hates the sinner, and the sinner hates God. He hates God so much that he seeks the destruction of His being. The sinner wishes there were no such being as God. "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God"" (Ps. 14:1). The heart is the seat of desires. Though he cannot get rid of these impressions of God, he wishes he could. A person who would live at liberty wishes there was no judge to call him to account. He could let loose the reins of vile affections if there were no God. They deny God in their lives. "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him" (Titus 1:16). Sin lays God aside and sets something base in His place.

If sin cannot take away the being of God, it strikes at His honor by making Him an unjust or evil God. Sin deprives God of the honor of all His attributes. First, it robs Him of His omniscience. Though we are ashamed to sin before others, we sin before God who sees all things. We do not blush if we can carry a wicked design under the veil of darkness. Does such a sinner truly think God is all seeing and all knowing? Second, it robs Him of His omnipotence. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?" (1 Cor. 10:22). It is a contest with God, as if we could arm our lusts against His mighty power. Will you contend with Him who can command legions of angels? Will you wage war with heaven and enter into combat with God? "Can your heart endure, or can your hands remain strong, in the days when I shall deal with you?" (Ezek. 22:14). Are you able to grapple with God's omnipotent arm? Can your heart endure when His almighty power seizes you and His displeasure breaks out against you?

Thus, we see that sin is enmity against God. We want no God, or we want an impotent, unjust, and unwise God. There is an enmity in sin against every person in the Trinity. First, it is against God the Son. When Christ came into the world, His great work was to dissolve the works of Satan. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). By your sin, you strive to make Christ's death of no effect (Heb. 10:29). Second, it

is against God the Spirit. It grieves Him because it is a direct thwarting of His motions and impulses. "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17). You reproach Him and say that He will not do any good upon your heart (Num. 15:30). Third, it is against God the Father. Though He is full of kindness, He cannot give sin a good look. "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness" (Hab. 1:13). God loves all His creatures, and He loves to look on them, but He hates sin. There is no antipathy greater than between these two natures. You may sooner reconcile fire and water, light and darkness, cold and heat, than God and sin. God's being is infinite, and His whole nature sets Him against sin. Therefore, there is no comparison which serves to set out the indignation that the Lord has against sin. There is no antipathy like it.

Disobeying God

Sin is a transgression of God's law. It puts such disgrace on the law. It does, in effect, condemn the law as if it were not good, useful, and righteous. "He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law" (James 4:11). This means that he acts as if God were not righteous in making such a law against evil talk. Nathan tells David his sin: "Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight?" (2 Sam. 12:9). In every sin there are some

implicit thoughts by which the law is disvalued and disapproved. We secretly tax it of envy and folly as if God had dealt harshly with His creatures. We look on it as a weak and simple thing.

CHAPTER 24

The Nature of Sin in Relation to Man

Next, we must consider the nature of sin with respect to us. The evil of sin appears in three things. First, it is a degradation of our nature, and it sets us beneath the rank of humans and makes us equal with animals. “Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish” (Ps. 49:12). “Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding” (Ps. 32:9). This implies that rash people who never consider their ways are like the horse and mule, which are void of understanding and are guided only by instinct. It would be an odd sight to see a person with the head of a mule or the feet of a horse, yet there is a greater affinity between the body of an animal and the body of a human than between the soul of an animal and the soul of a human.

Second, it is the defilement of our nature. The Scripture, when it speaks of sin, sets it out by “filthiness and overflow of wickedness” (James 1:21). This is an allusion to the Brook Kidron where the garbage of

the sacrifices was cast. Such a notion of sin ought to heighten our souls into a detestation of it. There is such filthiness in sin that it is ashamed of itself, and therefore it always seeks a disguise. It either seeks a show of virtue or a veil of darkness. Why does the adulterer seek for the twilight (Prov. 7:9)? He is ashamed of his sin. Sin is so monstrous and deformed that it seeks to hide itself from those who love it most, from the conscience of the one who commits it or from the sight of others. There is such wickedness in it that some sins beget shame in their name and mention. The apostle Paul speaks of a sin that "is not even named among the Gentiles" (1 Cor. 5:1). "But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints" (Eph. 5:3).

Third, it is the bondage of our nature. There is no worse captivity than this. Reason is displaced, and we are under the command of vile affections—a slave to pride, lusts, and carnal pleasures. Sin binds us with the cords of vanity. This is the preposterous judgment of most people, that they look on the service of God as their greatest bondage. "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us" (Ps. 2:3). In truth there is no greater freedom than to be employed in the service of God and to be free for the actions of a holy life. "And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts" (Ps. 119:45). There is no greater bondage than to be a slave to sin. "While they promise them liberty, they

themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage" (2 Peter 2:19). What a bondage is this—to be a vassal of hell, to be at the command of our lusts, to be a slave to pride and uncleanness, and to be ignorant as to how to remedy it!

CHAPTER 25

The Effect of Sin

Another argument to prove the evil of sin is taken from its effect. "Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing that you have forsaken the LORD your God" (Jer. 2:19). And where do we not find the sad effects of sin? We just need to survey the story of sin ever since it came into the world.

The first we hear of sin is in the fall of the angels. They were the most noble part of the universe, the courtiers of heaven. As soon as they sinned, they were made demons and cast into the pit of darkness. If we were to see ten thousand princes executed in one day, we would wonder at the cause of it, and yet this is but a slight comparison. If one sin cast down these angels, what will become of us who have millions of sins? If God casts angels out of heaven for one sin, what will become of us who are but dust? If we were to hear of a drop of poison that embitters a whole ocean of sweetness, we would wonder at its influence. Well, one sin in thought embittered the whole ocean of the angelic sweetness.

The next we hear of sin is in the fall of man. Adam merely tasted the forbidden fruit, and all his posterity were poisoned. In the morning, he was God's favorite, and in the evening the devil's slave. It did not only ruin all humanity, but it gave a crack to the whole creation. All the creatures groan under sin (Rom. 8:20–21). When God looked on the creatures He had made, He saw that all was good. But when Solomon looks on God's works, he sees nothing but vanity. Why? Sin intervened so that the creatures are the monuments not only of God's power but of man's rebellion.

The next dreadful instance of sin is in the old world. All humanity except eight people were swept away in the flood. The next we hear of sin is in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their sin was of such an evil influence that it made God rain down hell out of heaven (Gen. 19:24). We can trace the story of sin from Sodom to Zion. Who can read the book of Lamentations (the story of Jerusalem's sorrows) with dry eyes?

We can go even further and see the effects of sin on the Son of God. He is God's beloved one:

Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman;
And I was daily His delight,
Rejoicing always before Him. (Prov. 8:30)

See what sin did to Him! Look into the garden and see Him in His agony. Go to Golgotha and see Him hanging on the cross. When the Son of God complains

that He cannot actually enjoy the comfort of the Godhead, when the Sun of Righteousness complains of an eclipse and suspension of consolation, this is dreadful indeed! The human nature recoiled out of a just abhorrence at the suffering He was to endure. "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39). What would have become of us if Jesus Christ had not borne the blow?

We must also survey common experience. If all the graves in the world were piled in one heap, and all the bones of all the dead were stacked together, we may say that all these were slain by sin. All diseases, pestilences, wars, famines, tumults, and earthquakes are but the births of sin. It has laid houses desolate, wasted kingdoms, and destroyed cities.

We can come even closer to home. Consider the effects of sin on you in the terrors of your conscience:

Your fierce wrath has gone over me;
Your terrors have cut me off.
They came around me all day long like water;
They engulfed me altogether. (Ps. 88:16–17)

What a sad thing is this! Wherever he goes, he carries hell with him. When he lies down in his bed, hell lies down with him. When he walks in the field or garden, hell walks with him. When he goes about his business, hell goes with him. Sin is its own executioner. It might smile when we first meet it, but afterward it scourges the soul with horror and despair.

That which increases horror at the time of death is sin. "The sting of death is sin" (1 Cor. 15:56). When we are about to die and know that we must give an account, sin fills the soul with horror, shame, and anger. Some wicked people die carelessly. They are like a person who leaps in the dark over a bottomless gulf without realizing it. A wicked person is like a tree that grows on the bank of a river; he is on the borders of hell, and when he dies, he falls into it. When they come to die, sin will accuse, conscience will testify, the law will condemn, and the devil will insult. Heaven will be shut against them, and hell will enlarge its mouth. The body will curse the soul for being a poor guide, and the soul will curse the body for being a wicked instrument. It is sad when these two loving friends, body and soul, part with curses. They will never meet again except in torment. When a godly person dies, he takes a fair leave of his body. He goes down to the grave with the covenant of grace in his hand. But a wicked person dreads it. His body and soul must part with the expectation of meeting in flames.

All this is nothing in comparison to the everlasting estate that follows after death. Consider the loss and pain. Both declare the evil of sin. First, consider the loss. By sinning, you lose God and heaven for a trifle. For a little earthly pleasure, you thrust away eternal joy. Sadness will embrace you when you see the holy ones of God standing at the right hand of Christ while you are sent to your own place. Your heart will turn on you for your

folly. Then, you will know what sin is. Second, consider the pain. The good God, who is meekness and sweetness, will condemn His creature to eternal torments. Though the creature howls under this pain, He will not lessen it or remove it. Surely, there must be some great evil in sin which binds the hands of mercy. For a short temporal pleasure, you risk the hazard of eternal pain. We cannot endure an aching tooth. How will we endure the torment of eternal punishment? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). As long as God is God, hell will be hell. There can never be any hope that God's being can be destroyed or that there will be a cessation of those torments and pains. God lives forever to reward the godly and punish the wicked.

CHAPTER 26

The Aggravation of Sin

The third argument for the sinfulness of sin is its aggravation. This is evident in the following.

First, our sin is natural to us. It is necessary to reflect on this because it is the most difficult thing to be sufficiently affected with our sin by birth. Evils that come by accident are objects of pity, but evils of nature are objects of hatred. How may the Lord hate us who have evil in our nature! It is not accidental to us. Some will attempt to excuse their sin: "I cannot do otherwise. It is my nature." But it will be the cause of your ruin without an interest in Christ. The water that comes out of a pure fountain may be soiled and dirtied, but it will be clear again. But a puddle that runs out of a dunghill will always be filthy. Our sins are not by accident but by nature. They are not like the muddying of a clear fountain but like the unsavory liquid that comes out of a dunghill. Original sin is the sin of sins. We are born with such a sinful will that it is worse than any other sin. Actual sins are but transient acts, whereby violence is

offered to one of God's commandments. But original sin is a constant, rooted, abiding contrariety to God's nature. Actual sins are temporary, but this is an abiding enmity. Actual sins are like a fit of anger and displeasure, but this is a rooted hatred. This is the cause of all other sins, the bitter root that transmits a poison into all the branches. All other sins which a person commits are but the exercise of original sin. Actual transgressions are but the multiplication of original sin. All those traitorous actions of which we are guilty in the course of our lives are all summed up in original sin.

Second, our sins are many. We sin in praying, eating, working, and trading. The angels became demons for one sin—a proud thought against God's greatness. For this, they were thrown into places of darkness. What ruin will result from your many sins! If single sins seem light in themselves, what are they altogether? There is nothing lighter than one piece of sand, and yet there is nothing heavier than sand in a great quantity. A gnat and locust are inconsequential creatures on their own, but when they come in a multitude, they destroy whole countries. One sin was deadly, but what are they altogether? Though sins seem small in themselves, when they come in clusters, how soon they devour the life and comfort of the soul!

For innumerable evils have surrounded me;
My iniquities have overtaken me, so that
I am not able to look up;

They are more than the hairs of my head;
Therefore my heart fails me. (Ps. 40:12)

Nothing is little that is committed against the great God. Look on all the troubles of the servants of God, and you will find they were first occasioned by a small sin. But innumerable evils encompass you. Wherever you look, there is sin. If you look on duty, there is sin. If you look on your calling, there is sin. If you look on your recreations, there is sin. If you look on your past, there is sin. O, this indeed will make our hearts fail!

Third, our sins are often committed against knowledge. The more we know the law, the greater is the transgression. According to the sense we have of the law, so the offense is elevated. "In the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom" (Ps. 51:6). God had taught David wisdom, and yet he sinned against Him. According to the proportion of light, so the rate of sin rises. The more you know of the law, the more you sin against the law. It is sad to put the finger in nature's eye, but it is worse to sin against the light of God's Word because there is more enmity in it. When a person breaks through the restraints of conscience, it is a sign that he loves sin, and he sins for its own sake. This is clearly discerned in apostates who are carried on with malice, and they rage against the truth which they once professed. They not only commit sin but like it in others. They are the most violent and forward men to defend wicked ways. Sins against knowledge have the greatest marks of

divine vengeance and displeasure. When people abuse knowledge, God gives them up to foolishness, madness, and hardness of heart (Rom. 1:21–23).

Fourth, our sins are often committed against love. It is sad to sin against God's law; it is sadder to sin against God's love. It is against God's common love. He gives us food, clothing, rain, and fruitful seasons. We "despise the riches of His goodness" (Rom. 2:4) by employing His common love for vile uses or by not taking notice of it. In effect, those who slight the kindness of God say, "For all this, God will not gain me to His ways." Not every sin is against knowledge, but every sin is against love. The Lord may plead, "I have given you protection and provision, food and clothing; for which of these do you violate My law and put such an affront on Me? I have been liberal to you in giving you the fruits of the earth, the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air. I have caused your sheep to bring forth thousands and your fields to yield harvests. And will you turn on Me with My own weapons?" But we sin not only against God's common love but against His special love. Every sin is a stab at the heart of His mercy.

Fifth, our sins are often against vows, covenants, and promises. You commit sin under the show of friendship. When you have promised obedience, you have promised a necessary thing. God might require duty from you and punish you for the violation of His law, whether you vowed or not. It was never left to your pleasure to deal

falsely in your covenant with people. Such solemn obligations should be sacred and unchangeable. What is it to break vows with God after we have solemnly renewed our covenant with Him?

Sixth, our sins are often against our former experiences, either of the sweetness of grace or of the evil of sin. Regarding the sweetness of grace, the Lord takes it ill that you sin against Him after you “have tasted the good word” (Heb. 6:5). It is a mighty affront to Christ to stray from Him after we have experienced the sweetness of His ways. The apostle calls this “denying the Lord who bought them” (2 Peter 2:1)—that is, in respect to the outward covenant that is between the Lord and every church member. So, we find the Lord contends with His people about their provocations. “What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters?” (Jer. 2:5). You have gone far from God and departed from His ways. What is the matter? Did He ever hurt you? “O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me” (Mic. 6:3). When we go away from God, we do (as it were) proclaim that we have found some discouragement in the ways of Christ.

When a person has found the bitterness of sin, when it has weakened his body and broken his peace, and yet he runs into it again, it is a sad aggravation. When we tamper with sins that have cost us so much trouble, and when we have found the hand of God on us, yet we still

venture to sin, it is as the breaking of a bone in the same place. "You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have" (James 4:2). This is a fight with God.

CHAPTER 27

God's Wisdom in the Gospel

I will now propose to you the wisdom of the gospel as a subject for your meditation. It is the mystery of mysteries, the fairest picture that ever came from the works of God. "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16). This is a depth that cannot easily be fathomed. Here are miracles enfolded in miracles and mysteries in mysteries. God would amaze man and save him at the same time. Christ is called "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), not only because the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him and through Him conveyed to the creatures, but because God's wisdom is most discerned in Him by putting our salvation into His hands. He is not only a fountain of wisdom but a map of wisdom, discovering the excellent designs of God and the curious variety that is in His counsels. God shows wisdom in all things. "O LORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all" (Ps. 104:24). Every creature contributes to the glory of their Creator. But God would reveal the marvel of His

wisdom. The world is His work, but the gospel is His plan. And, therefore, in your solemn and most deliberate thoughts, you should take a view of it.

It is the great duty of saints. Paul prays “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:17–19). This should be our continual task. There are two great mysteries in the world: Christ and antichrist, the mystery of the gospel and the mystery of iniquity. It is the great advantage of Christians to discern the mystery of iniquity and to meditate on the mystery of godliness; to observe antichrist’s cunning and to consider the wisdom of the gospel. Exercise your thoughts in this and study the excellence of God’s design. Bring reverent thoughts, that by a deliberate gaze you may raise your souls to a holy wonder and admiration.

To prepare you to consecrate your thoughts for the entertainment of so great a mystery, consider these things.

First, when you have done your utmost, your thoughts will still fall short. “His understanding is unsearchable” (Isa. 40:28). There is an excess in every divine attribute above all human thought and conception, and though we seek after God, we cannot find Him out to perfection. Now, among all His attributes,

none is more hidden from us than His wisdom. Power is obvious, but our foolish spirits cannot trace the wisdom of providence, much more His wisdom in the gospel. One of the names of Christ is "Wonderful" (Isa. 9:6). It is a point that we should always be studying, and yet we can never come to the bottom of it. Therefore, what is lacking in thoughts must be supplied by wonder. When we have done all, we must cry out, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). It is as if Paul had said, "I have done as much as I can. I have discovered as much as I am able. I must leave disputing and fall to wondering." The light of the Scripture does not reveal God fully. "We know in part and we prophesy in part" (1 Cor. 13:9). Full knowledge is our portion in heaven. These are but partial discoveries in the Word of God. However, this is no excuse for negligence, for we must "pursue the knowledge of the LORD" (Hos. 6:3).

It is the fault of Christians that they keep to their milk and childish thoughts and apprehensions. We should rise higher in our considerations and admirations of the lovely wisdom of God. It is notable that Moses's first request to God was, "What is [Your] name?" (Ex. 3:13). And then, "Please, show me Your glory" (Ex. 33:18). We must move on from considering God's name to clearer sights of His glory. Nor is it an excuse for barrenness. Empty thoughts, void of argument and

discourse, beget a confused stupor, not a wonder. The thoughts are only stayed, not raised.

Not only humans, but angels are at a loss in this great mystery. They study it but cannot come to the bottom of it. Peter speaks of those things which "angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12). The word signifies to bow down and bend the body. It is an allusion to the cherubim who were pictured over the ark stooping and (as it were) bending their bodies, as prying into the mysteries of the ark. The mysteries of the gospel are so sublime that the angels, who continually behold the face of God, cannot perfectly comprehend them. They are improving their knowledge by learning and improving the dispensations of God to the church "to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). This might be the meaning of the apostle in 1 Timothy 3:16, "seen by angels." With reverence, admiration, and wonder, they see Christ stoop so low and condescend to a nature so much beneath their own. We should never weary of searching into these holy mysteries and acting our thoughts on them.

Those who wonder most at the plan of the gospel have most interest in it. To others, it is but a cold story or naked plot. Personal interest sharpens intention and affection. Their eyes are open, and they have more intense feelings. That is the reason why the enjoyments of the saints have notes of wonder annexed to

the expressions of them. For example, the peace of God “surpasses all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). Again, the joy of the Lord is “inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). Those who have a taste of it know what it is to enjoy a calm conscience through the application of the promises of the gospel. Those who are called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9) can best wonder at the plan of the gospel. They wonder in their thoughts that God should design their heaven, plan their salvation before all worlds, how they may be vessels filled with glory. Wonderful, unutterable joy! These are the apprehensions of God's children. Others may look on the gospel as a probable truth, but God's people find it to be a comfortable truth. Therefore, their hearts are raised in wonder.

CHAPTER 28

The Beauty of the Gospel

I come to the work of meditating on God's wisdom in the gospel. The place to begin is by observing all that is beautiful and excellent in the gospel.

First, observe that God did not contrive to save the fallen angels. "For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16). He was not made an angel for angels as He was made a human for humans. God reveals the severity of His justice in angels but the riches of His mercy in us. God would not so much as treat with fallen angels, but He planned a way to rescue us. There was grace shown in the election of angels, but not mercy. None of the fallen angels were saved, but fallen humans are called to grace in Christ. Certainly, whatever the cause, there was much of wisdom and mercy in it. Love after a breach is more glorious. It is more to be reconciled than to be confirmed. The penitent has more cause to glorify God than the innocent—those who are received to mercy than those who are confirmed by grace. We have cause to bless

God, that He has revealed His justice against angels and His mercy to us.

Second, observe that those things which we count the ruin of man were, through the wisdom of providence, his preservation. The fall of angels, the fall of man, those crooked things which seemed to be the destruction of the creature, through the overruling of God, made for the manifestation of His glory. Providence has many turnings, but all concur to the beauty of the whole. The apostle calls it "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). Therefore, we are not to judge by present sense. God's mending is better than His making. He would have all fall to pieces to discover more of His mercy. Man must commit a shameful act, and Christ must suffer a shameful death, and all this to advance His glory. The Lord would first have man to fall and ruin himself, that he might be better established by His grace.

Third, observe that God sent His Son. God was not limited or bound to do so. But it pleased the Father that "in Him all the fullness should dwell" (Col. 1:19). It was God's will that salvation should be brought about this way. In the whole business of salvation, God would proceed by choice, not necessity. God could have come as a king in glory and triumph and wrestled with Satan and rescued all the elect out of his hands. But the Lord would not reveal His power but His love. He had revealed His power in creation (Rom. 1:20). But by redemption, He declared His wisdom. Every attribute of God was

to be revealed in its season. Adam fell by pride, and to counterwork this, Christ was to restore humanity by humility. When He comes to save us, He lays aside His majesty and puts on a humble garb. He would not save humanity by power, but by suffering. The Lord's design was to show the nature of the disease by the quality of the remedy.

Fourth, observe that neither human nor angel could have invented such an excellent design as this. It could not have come into our heads or hearts, and therefore it came only from the heart of God. It was devised by the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. "Who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" (Rom. 11:34). What creature did prescribe to God or direct Him to such a way? The apostle shows it could not enter into the creature's thoughts: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). From the context, it is evident that he is speaking of the doctrine of Christ crucified. Neither sense nor reason could suggest such a thing to the creature. There are some seeds of the law in nature, but not the least seeds of the gospel. If the Lord had waited until we had devised a way for our own comfort, we would have been miserable for all eternity.

Fifth, observe that God revealed this design before it was accomplished in the fullness of time. "Before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa. 42:9). This love was

too big to be contained in His heart; He must open His mind. The prophecies and promises of the Old Testament were the eruptions and overflows of God's love. His heart was so full of love that it could not be contained within the bounds of secrecy. He opens His heart and gives vent to His love in the midst of anger. As soon as man had displeased Him, God imparts the promise that the seed of the woman would break the serpent's head.

Sixth, observe that God revealed all this by degrees—first in types, then in truths; first in promises, then in performances. God spoke to His people formerly, not so much by words as by things. God would prepare the world by degrees, so the day grows until it comes to high noon. He has opened all His good treasure to us.

CHAPTER 29

God's Glory in the Gospel

Having meditated on the beauty of the gospel, we proceed to God's glory in the gospel.

First, it commends His love. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Here was the commendation of divine love, that God would give up the Son of His love to die for those who were sinners. "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself" (Heb. 6:13). So, when the Lord could give us no greater gifts, He gave us His Son. David is amazed with wonder when he considers the power of God in making the moon and stars, much more when he considers the love of God in framing man (Ps. 8:3-4). But the Son of God becomes man for us. O, that Jesus Christ should stoop so low! He who fills all things was shut up in the narrow straits of the virgin's womb. Christ disrobed Himself of all His glory and submitted to the greatest abasement. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only

begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Second, the gospel reveals God's justice. One attribute is not to be exercised to the wrong or prejudice of another. Now, in this excellent plan, God glorified His mercy so as His justice was no loser, it being sufficiently satisfied in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, justice, which is our dread, is, in Christ, the ground of our comfort and support. The attribute that would discourage sinners now invites and draws them to Christ. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25–26). God would dispense acts of grace with the greatest advantage to His justice. This is the beauty of His design. He would be just by justification, and those acts, which to us are acts of mere grace, are now made acts of righteousness.

Third, the gospel preserved the authority of the law. In innocence, God had written a law in man's heart, and he was to preserve the honor of it. But man transgressed this law. Now, by appointing Jesus Christ to die for us, the dignity of the law is maintained. Impunity makes

sin to be lightly esteemed. When laws are relaxed, there must be some commutation or recompense, or else their authority is not preserved. "Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18). The omission of punishment would detract from it; therefore, Christ was "born under the law" (Gal. 4:4).

Fourth, the gospel reveals God's essence, even the whole Trinity (the Father, the Son, and the Spirit). The doctrine of the Trinity was but darkly revealed in the Old Testament until Christ came in the flesh. One of the main designs of our redemption was to discover God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. There is a God who must be satisfied, there is a God who must satisfy, and there is a God who must seal up all this to the soul. At Christ's baptism, when He was solemnly inaugurated into His mediatorship, there was a discovery of the Trinity: the Father in a voice, the Son in a person, and the Spirit in the shape of a dove.

CHAPTER 30

Man's Comfort in the Gospel

Finally, we meditate on how the gospel is man's greatest comfort.

First, observe the sufficiency of Christ's sufferings. Though sin is a temporary act, it is infinite because it is committed against an infinite majesty. So, Christ's suffering was a temporary act, yet it was infinite because He was both God and man. As sins receive a value from the person against whom they are committed, so Christ's suffering receives a value from the person by whom it is performed. The apostle puts a "how much more" on the blood of Christ. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Heb. 9:14). His Godhead puts a value on His blood to expiate the guilt of sin, and therefore the blood of Christ is called the blood of God (Acts 20:28). Truly, if sin abounds, grace has superabounded. The purpose of God was to give us

victory over the clamors of our conscience. Sin is expiated and done away by the blood of the Son of God.

Second, observe the excellent provision that is made for all that we need. "Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). To unite fallen man to God! Mortal and immortal, greatness and baseness, finiteness and infiniteness, are brought together. There is God and man in one person, that there might be a relationship between God and us. Our nature is grafted and planted into the person of Christ, that our persons might have communion with God.

Third, observe how justice and mercy are brought together. The great inquiry of nature is how to have satisfaction for justice that mercy might have a free course. What will we do to recompense justice? Creatures would sacrifice themselves and all they have.

With what shall I come before the LORD,
And bow myself before the High God?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
With calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
Ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
(Mic. 6:6-7)

Not our firstborn, but God's firstborn! The Lord has provided a merit against our defects. The Lord is at peace with us, and we are enabled comfortably to serve God.

Fourth, observe the profit that comes to us. *It shows us the seriousness of sin.* When the punishment of our sins is laid on Christ, God shows how displeasing sin is to Him. Also, *it weans us from vanity.* You make a great deal of trifles and are inclined to idolize every petty thing in the world. Therefore, the Lord shows us the highest self-denial when Christ took the human nature to Himself and endured the wrath of God. This should beget a special reverence towards Him. *It overcomes us by love.* It lays a great engagement on a sinner. God has taken His own Son and sacrificed Him, that we might stop fighting against heaven. God overcomes sin by the highest act of goodness and kindness imaginable. Hereby, He would shame and overcome the heart of a poor sinner. *It gives us a high and glorious pattern of obedience.* Christ leaves us a glorious example.

Fifth, compare the gospel with creation. The Lord revealed much of His glory in making the world out of nothing, but He revealed more of His glory when Christ was born into this world. This was His masterpiece in which He purposed to gain the most honor and glory for Himself. The world was made with a word but redeemed with this act of wisdom. The world was made for man and woman, but Christ was made out of a woman. In the creation, God made us like Himself,

but here the Lord made Himself like us. In the creation, all things were made out of nothing; here, order came out of confusion. In the creation, man was made out of the earth, but here God was made man. In the creation, God took the high road to do us good; in redemption, He came by the low road. Christ abased Himself for our sakes.

Sixth, compare the gospel with other deliverances. It was a great thing to be delivered out of Egypt and Babylon, but it is a far greater thing to be delivered from the wrath to come. The children of Israel were delivered from the oppression of Pharaoh, but we are delivered from Satan. God gave them food and satisfied their hunger, but Christ is made bread and food to the soul. They had deliverance from diseases, but we from sin. We see the depth of mercy swallowing up the depth of sin and the glorious love of God breaking out in such a wonderful deliverance by Christ, that we may cry out, "Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Ps. 107:31).

CHAPTER 31

The Mystery of Providence

I will propose a final object of meditation: God's providence. There is a God; therefore, there is providence. His wisdom and goodness enforce it. He is so wisely good. "You are good, and do good" (Ps. 119:68). The divine wisdom orders all things for an end, and the divine power governs all things to achieve that end. We read it in the order of the world and the sense of our own conscience.

But now ask the beasts, and they will teach you;
And the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
Or speak to the earth, and it will teach you;
And the fish of the sea will explain to you.
Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the LORD has done this?
(Job 12:7-9)

Providence is a continual chain of decrees, actions, and events, from the creation to the day of judgment. It is our duty to understand it at present, and it will be our happiness to understand it in glory. "Whoever is wise

will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Ps. 107:43). It is an excellent piece of wisdom to be able to link events together, that we may see the wisdom and love of God in events.

Power is such an obvious attribute to a common and careless eye. The heathens know it. "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). But to find out the beauty and wisdom of God's work, we need the light of faith and some acquaintance with God. Therefore, it is said,

Oh, that God would speak,
And...show you the secrets of wisdom!
For they would double your prudence.
(Job 11:5-6)

Power is obvious to sense and reason, but wisdom is scarcely discernible to faith. There is an outside and an inside in all divine dispensations. The outside is full of beauty, but it is dark to the inside, to the secrets of wisdom. God's works are full of mysteries, and we cannot understand them unless God is our teacher. We are blind, and therefore we murmur. But the full knowledge of the mysteries of providence is reserved for our portion in heaven when we will know as we are known. "Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known"

(1 Cor. 13:12). We will view all the passages of providence by which we have been brought to glory and see their beautiful order and links. When we are on the top of the mount, we will look back and see how many crooked lanes we have passed, and God knew us all along. He not only led us in but led us out. Then, we will know the multitude of His thoughts.

By careful observation, we may discern a little for the present. David declares, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Ps. 139:17). David looked back and saw how God had carried him through many difficulties and brought him to rule His people and watched over him with a careful eye of providence and ordered every event for his comfort. We too may have some general view and knowledge at present.

CHAPTER 32

The Grounds of Providence

I will now show you what God's providence is. To begin with, it is founded in His nature and attributes.

First, it is founded in God's omniscience. Like the sun, God is all light and all sight. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). In the church, the home, and the shop, the eyes of the Lord are everywhere, and He beholds not only the evil person and the good person, but the evil action and the good action. Chiefly, God's eyes are on His children because they fall under His special care. "The eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9). God minds their whole condition, takes notice of their wants, dangers, and troubles, and shows Himself strong in supplying and delivering them.

God not only knows their persons, but their way. "The LORD knows the way of the righteous" (Ps. 1:6). God takes notice of our every step and every care. By one

intuition, all things are present to God. Therefore, when Christ would comfort His disciples and fence them against worldly care, He says, "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things" (Matt. 6:32). God takes an exact and particular account of all our wants and needs. So, the psalmist says,

You number my wanderings;
Put my tears into Your bottle;
Are they not in Your book? (Ps. 56:8)

There is not a shed tear that is not treasured up in God's bottle. There is not a weary step, taken for His name's sake, that is not recorded in His book. But if this is not full enough to commend the particularity of God's care, He goes higher. "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me" (Isa. 49:16). When we are inclined to forget, we fix a memorial on our hands, and if we forget a thing recorded in our book, we will not forget what is imprinted on our hands.

Second, it is founded in God's wisdom. He knows our needs, and He orders our deliverance. There is something of counsel in all that He does, for He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). His will is called His "purpose" (Acts 4:28). There is not only a mighty hand seen in all the dispensations of God, but a wise counsel. So, these two attributes are coupled in Job 9:4, "God is wise in heart and mighty in strength." We

are rash and impulsive, carried on with more resolution than reason. Our desires produce a heat that overcomes us. But whatever God does, it is with exact judgment. If we had eyes to see it, we would see that all the circumstances of providence are disposed with much skill.

Third, it is founded in God's power. He has power to execute and administer that which His wisdom has devised. God's counsels and purposes are always accomplished. His power is the midwife to His blessed decrees. He conceives all things in the womb of His will, and then He brings them forth by His mighty power. "He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9). God claims this as the privilege of the Godhead: "And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me" (Isa. 44:7). By calling, He can ordain and create. When Christ would reveal the power of His Godhead, He used a word of omnipotence: "I am willing; be cleansed" (Matt. 8:3). God's power in providence is revealed in three ways.

First, God's providence is revealed *by working without means*. God is not bound to the road of nature or tied to the course of second causes. He can create where there is nothing. Therefore, when God is represented as an object of trust, this expression is used: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:19). He is able to create where nothing is found. So, God promises,

I will have mercy on the house of Judah,
Will save them by the LORD their God,
And will not save them by bow,
Nor by sword or battle,
By horses or horsemen. (Hos. 1:7)

God has a purpose to save them, but it will not be by any of these things. God will do it by an invisible power. Sometimes, God does not supply by the ordinary means but by the powerful word of His providence or commanded blessing.

Second, God's providence is revealed *by working with unlikely means*. There is nothing so evil or insignificant by which God cannot work. In the story of Joseph, a lie cast him into prison, and a dream fetched him out. So, the Lord makes use of the errors of men. Omnipotence needs no outward advantage. God's instruments are usually despicable. A straw is as good as a spear in the hands of omnipotence. Most of the judges who rescued Israel were taken from the plough and sheepfold. So, for judgments, God punishes sinners by weak means. Egypt was plagued with flies and lice. They were strong to execute God's Word.

Finally, God's providence is revealed *by working with contrary means*. Christ used clay and spittle to restore sight to the blind man. Joseph was first made a slave and then a favorite. His brothers first sold him and then worshiped him. He is cast into the dungeon to be elevated to court. There are strange contrivances and contrarieties in

providence. The way seems contrary to the aim, and the means disproportionate to the end. When we see great confusions in the world, we wonder how this could tend to God's glory and the church's good. We are inclined to say, "What will You do for Your great name?" (Josh. 7:9). We wonder how God means to save and how confusion and mischief can end in order and beauty. But God knows the sufficiency of His power, and He is able to bring about these things to bring light out of darkness and one contrary out of another.

CHAPTER 33

The Acts of Providence

There are three acts in God's providence.

The first is conservation. God keeps all creatures in their being. Therefore, the apostle says that He upholds "all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). If God were to remove the shoulder of His providence, all things would return to nothing. They would vanish and disappear. Providence is a continual creation. Everything that is kept in being is (as it were) newly born, newly produced. This is the reason why the Holy Spirit speaks in the present tense: "who stretch out the heavens like a curtain" (Ps. 104:2). And in Isaiah 40:22:

It is He...

Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

It is not in the future tense because God is always stretching them out. And so our Savior says, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5:17).

Though there is a cessation of work in regard of new kinds, there is a continuation of work in regard of their preservation and God's providential influence. The power which raised from nothing must still preserve from nothing. "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things" (Rom. 11:36). This is what Solomon intends when he says, "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the LORD has made them both" (Prov. 20:12). He does not mean spiritually, but naturally. He does not only give the faculty, but the exercise. As He gives the eye, so the seeing, and as He gives the ear, so the hearing. This could not be done without new acts of providence, assistance, and support from God. Therefore, we read that Hagar did not see the well of water until the Lord opened her eyes (Gen. 21:19). When the Lord suspended His influence, the fire could not burn the three children. God did not destroy the property of the fire, but only suspended its efficacy. No creature can put forth itself in a way of operation without a new providential assistance from God.

The second act is governance. All things act according to His will and pleasure. All things keep their course, for God sits at the helm and steers all. "He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan. 4:35). God does all according to His pleasure. He is not confined by any external law or straitened by the course of nature,

but He acts with sovereignty and freedom, and sometimes inverts the order of second causes.

There are indeed some standing ordinances of nature, as the ordinances of sun and moon and the covenant of day and night:

Thus says the LORD,
Who gives the sun for a light by day,
The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a
light by night. (Jer. 31:35)

While the earth remains,
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
And day and night
Shall not cease. (Gen. 8:22)

But God can alter the course of these, as in Joshua's time and at Christ's death. There were three days of darkness in Egypt. There is nothing so casual that is not governed by God. Everything falls under the ordination of His wise counsel. "Now a certain man drew a bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of his armor" (1 Kings 22:34). It was a mere chance to him, but God directed it into the side of the king. There is nothing so casual that is not directed by the wise ordination of God. "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). There seems to be nothing so trivial as the casting of the lot into the lap,

yet it is overruled by God. He does not only permit but govern. God governs all His creatures.

The third act is ordination. All things are overruled by God's great power. It is not as the creature wills, but as God wills. Many times, the creatures are serviceable to the designs of God, contrary to their intentions. The king of Assyria was moved with a principle of ambition, rage, and cruelty, but the Lord sent him on His work:

I will send him against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath
I will give him charge,
To seize the spoil, to take the prey,
And to tread them down like the
 mire of the streets.
Yet he does not mean so,
Nor does his heart think so;
But it is in his heart to destroy,
And cut off not a few nations. (Isa. 10:6-7)

So, Augustus ordered a census out of covetousness to tax the whole world, but God ordered it for the ensuring of Christ's birth at Bethlehem (Luke 2).

The acts of the creature are disposed, whatever the purposes of the creature might be. God reveals His wisdom by man's folly and His righteousness by man's sin. As in a ship some sleep and some walk contrary to the ship's motion, so in the world some people are negligent and seek to resist the designs of God, but the ship goes on. "To do whatever Your hand and Your purpose

determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28). The devil thought to ruin all humanity by seducing Adam, yet that made way for Christ. Herein is the great beauty and order of providence, that God can turn hindrances into helps, and while people seek to cross His will, they accomplish it.

CHAPTER 34

Providential Care and Comfort

I will conclude by making several observations concerning God's providence and why it is a comforting doctrine.

First, God's providence reaches to the least and most insignificant things, such as the flight of a sparrow or the falling of a hair. "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt. 10:29–30). God takes particular account of every concernment and circumstance of our lives. "He counts the number of the stars" (Ps. 147:4). It is a wonder that God should be at leisure to count the stars, much more that He should take particular notice of the hair on our head.

Second, God's providence extends to all things, yet it is chiefly exercised in regard to humans and angels. The psalmist says, "O LORD, You preserve man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). Other things that are void of understanding are only guided by an external principle without the knowledge of an end, as arrows shot by a bow. But

rational creatures have a principle of their own—prudence, which is a shadow of divine providence. Man's will is rebellious. It is harder to rule a skittish horse than to roll a stone. God challenges this as His own prerogative. "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). God can bridle and restrain the hearts of men and turn them as He pleases (Prov. 21:1). The hearts of kings seem to be most free by will and passion, yet God can turn them and rule them at His pleasure.

Third, God's providence chiefly concerns people, yet His chief care is about the good of the elect. "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matt. 6:26). "We trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). He is a "Savior of all men" in regard of providential administration, but He particularly looks after His people. The elect are the darlings of providence. The world is continued for their sakes (Isa. 13:3–4). The rest of the world is but dust and refuse, which God will give up to His justice. God will stain the glory of all the world for the elect's sake. If God throws them into the furnace, He sits by the furnace, testing and looking after His metal (Mal. 3:3). The fire will not be too hot so that nothing will be lost.

Fourth, God's providence must not be considered by pieces, but all together. You must consider the way of

God with the aim of God and the means with the end. You must not measure things by present feeling. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). A single part of providence, taken out of the frame, seems odd, but the manifold wisdom of God is in it. All the links of the chain of providence are not the same size. The single links of providence are not all of the same sort. To an observant eye, there is a wonderful beauty in the providences of God. There is no beauty in the parts of a building until they are set together. Nor is there any beauty in the several pieces of providence until you compare them with one another. The first strokes of a painting are unseemly; therefore, do not look on God's work by parts, but all together.

Fifth, God manages and governs all things without any difficulty. He is not burdened with a multitude of cares. It costs Him no more to govern angels than to govern ants, to govern palaces than to govern cottages. The sun as easily shines on a thousand places at one time as on one field. Likewise, the Lord as easily manages the affairs of the whole world as any one place in the world. His care is without trouble, and His work is without effort. All things are represented to Him in one view.

Sixth, God's providence is conversant about sin, yet without sin. God works with us, but He does not come into the fellowship of our sin or guilt. The sunbeams may shine on a dunghill, but the sun is not stained. The

apostle says, "For in Him we live and move" (Acts 17:28). We are moved by Him. But as the lameness of the horse is no blemish to the rider, so the defect of the creature is not to be imputed to the providence that supports it.

Seventh, God's providence does not take away the industry or liberty of the creature. We must plough. Though the clouds drop rain, there is a place for human industry, counsel, and deliberation. Observe the providences of God to you in the womb and from the womb. "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" (Ps. 139:17). The great aim of providence is God's glory and the salvation of the elect. "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

When you have meditated on God's providence, apply it to your own hearts for your use and comfort. First, consider the care which God has over all creatures. Apply God's providence against your fears. Consider that divine providence is above human wisdom (Job 5:13). Suppose they are able to contrive mischief; God can hinder its execution. Do you fear the cunning of Satan? Consider that providence is chiefly exercised for this end, to defeat the power of Satan. God's providence governs the swine. How much more the flock of Christ!

Second, encourage your hearts with God's providence so that you trust in Him for outward provision. When you are humbled with difficulties, and you are

unable to provide for your families, consider God's providence. All things wait on Him (Pss. 145:16, 19; 147:9).

Third, encourage your hearts to be patient under miseries. Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from God's providence. Therefore, certainly, your crosses fall under the wise dispensation of God. "Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain" (Ps. 39:6). Urge your hearts to be thankful for God's many mercies. Look on the first cause and acknowledge God's providence in all that you enjoy.

Fourth, consider God's providence to you in particular. Consider how God watched over you in the womb. When He took you out from there, He sustained you. He took care of you whenever you have been in distress. "This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps. 34:6). I have been in such distress, yet the Lord has heard and delivered me. Cast "all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

Conclusion

There are many who possess a sharp understanding yet are stark blind in the things of God. Some are able to repeat truths by rote because they have memorized them. Others understand something of God's Word and have a settled opinion on many matters. These people are often orthodox, and they have so much judgment and knowledge that they hold firmly to the truth. But the issue with such as these is that their heart is not possessed with the life and power of the truths they claim to know. They have "the form of knowledge" (Rom. 2:20). They have "a form of godliness," but deny its "power" (2 Tim. 3:5).

They lack a gracious illumination, whereby they are taught by God so as to be drawn to Him. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me" (John 6:44–45). When people are taught by God, they so understand His truth as to

apply it and make a right use of it in their lives. Such knowledge is called not only *sight*, but *taste*. "Indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Peter 2:3). It is feeling what we understand. "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment" (Phil. 1:9). Such taste is an experiential knowledge.

First, it is illuminative. It gives a clear sight of God's truths. Many people have nothing more than a hearsay knowledge, gathered out of books and sermons. But those who are divinely enlightened have God's truth written on their hearts. "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts" (Heb. 8:10). As a result, God's truth grows more satisfying to them, and it moves on them.

Second, it is applicative. It is not only knowledge, but prudence. "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence" (Prov. 8:12). Wisdom is the knowledge of principles, whereas prudence is an ability to apply principles to our comfort and for our use, that we may know them for our good (Job 5:27). The Holy Spirit not only reveals the truths of the gospel but applies them to us, to awaken the conscience that is sleeping in sin. Unbelievers may comprehend general truths concerning the misery of man, the redemption by Christ, and the privileges of a Christian, but they do not reflect the light of these truths on themselves so as to consider their own case. As a result, their knowledge is a matter of opinion, and

it serves only for debate and discourse. It does not touch their life because it is not directive.

Third, it is affective. Wisdom enters the “heart” (Prov. 2:10). The heart is the seat of the affections, which stir up the soul in answerable motions to every truth. When truths are merely barren notions, without feeling or an answerable touch on the heart, the knowledge of them is like a winter’s sun that shines but warms not. The misery of man is not affective, and the doctrine of redemption by Christ is apprehended without any joy or delight.

Fourth, it is transformative. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). The gospel is a light that is both directive and persuasive. It prevails over our sins and lusts. “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3–4). A true knowledge of God is able to bridle lusts and purify the conscience. For this reason, it is said that “he who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 11). Whatever speculations he may have about God’s truth, he does not have a true sight.

Such gracious illumination is not a speculative light or a bare notion of things. It is such a learning as the effect will necessarily follow. It is such a light as converts the soul and frames our hearts and ways according

to God's will. When the work of grace is expressed by knowledge, a theoretical and notional knowledge is never in view, but that which is practical and operative. It is a knowledge that works such a change in the inward and outward person as that the mind, heart, and will express a conformity to God's law.