

A Christian on the Mount — A Treatise Concerning Meditation



**Part
Three**



Thomas Watson

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A Treatise Concerning Meditation Concluded

“His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night” Psalm 1:2.

Chapter VII — Showing the necessity of Meditation

It is not enough to carry the book of God’s law about us, but we must meditate in it. The necessity of meditation will appear in three particulars.

I. The end why God hath given us his word written and preached, is not only to know it, but that we should meditate in it. The word is a letter of the great God written to us; now we must not run it over in haste, but meditate upon God’s wisdom in inditing [authoring it], and his love in sending it to us. Why doth the physician give his patient a receipt; is it that he should only read it over and know the receipt, or that he should apply it? the end why God communicates his gospel receipts to us is, that we should apply them by fruitful meditation. Would God, think we, ever have been at the pains of writing his law with his own finger, only that we should have the theory and notion of it? is it not that we should meditate in it? Would he ever have been at the cost to send abroad his ministers into the world, to furnish them with gifts, Eph. 4:11, 12. and must they for the work of Christ be nigh unto death, Phil. 2:30. that Christians should only have an empty knowledge of the truths published? Is it only speculation, or meditation that God aims at?

II. The necessity of meditation appears in this, because without it we can never be good Christians; a Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools.

1. Without meditation the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without

meditation all is lost; meditation imprints and fastens a truth in the mind, it is like the selvedge which keeps the cloth from ravelling. Serious meditation is like the engraving of letters in gold or marble, which endure: without this all our preaching to you is but like writing in sand, like pouring water into a sieve, like throwing a bur [a thing that clings] upon a crystal, which glides off and doth not stay. Reading and hearing without meditation is like weak physic [medicine] which will not work; want of meditation hath made so many sermons in this age to miscarry.

2. Without meditation the truths which we know will never affect our hearts; “These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart.” Deut. 6:6. How can the word be in the heart, unless it be wrought in by meditation? as a hammer drives a nail to the head, so meditation drives a truth to the heart. It is not the taking in of food, but the stomach’s concocting it, which makes it turn to blood and spirits; so it is not the taking in of a truth at the ear, but the meditating on it, which is the concoction of it in the mind, makes it nourish. Without meditation the word preached may increase notion, not affection. There is as much difference between the knowledge of a truth and the meditation on a truth, as there is between the light of a torch, and the light of the sun. Set up a lamp or torch in the garden, and it hath no influence: the sun hath a sweet influence, it makes the plants grow, and the herbs flourish: so knowledge is but like a torch lighted in the understanding, which hath little or no influence, it makes not a man the better; but meditation is like the shining of the sun, it operates upon the affections, it warms the heart and makes it more holy. Meditation gives life to a truth. There are many truths that lie, as it were, in the heart dead, which when we meditate upon, they begin to have life and heat in them. Meditation on a truth is like rubbing a man in a swoon; it fetcheth life. It is meditation makes a Christian.

III. Without meditation we make ourselves guilty of slighting God and his word. If a man lets a thing lie by, and never minds it,

it is a sign he slight it: God's word is the book of life; not to meditate in it, is to undervalue it. If a king puts forth an edict or proclamation, and the subjects never mind it, it is a slighting of the king's authority. God puts forth his law as a royal edict; if we do not meditate in it, it is a slighting his authority, and what doth this amount to less than a contempt done to the Divine majesty.

Chapter VIII — Showing the reason why there are so few good Christians

Use 1. Information. It gives us a true account why there are so few good Christians in the world; namely, because there are so few meditating Christians: we have many that have bible ears, they are swift to hear, but slow to meditate. This duty is grown almost out of fashion: people are so much in the shop, that they are seldom on the mount with God. Where is the meditating Christian? Diogenes, in a full market, was seeking up and down, and being asked what he sought for, saith, I seek for a man, that was to say, a wise man, a philosopher: among the crowd of professors, I might search for a Christian, namely, a meditating Christian. Where is he that meditates on sin, hell, eternity, the recompense of reward; that takes a prospect of heaven every day? where is the meditating Christian? It is to be lamented in our times, that so many who go under the name of professors, have banished good discourse from their tables, and meditation from their closets. Surely the hand of Joab is in this!

The devil is an enemy to meditation; he cares not how much people read and hear, nor how little they meditate; he knows that meditation is a means to compose the heart, and bring it into a gracious frame: now the devil is against that. Satan is content that you should be hearing and praying Christians, so that ye be not meditating Christians; he can stand your small shot, provided you do not put in this bullet.

Chapter IX — A Reproof to such as do not meditate in God's law

Use 2. Of reproof. It serves to reprove those who meditate

indeed, but not in the law of God: they turn all their meditations the wrong way; like a man that lets forth the water of his mill, which should grind his corn, into the highway, where it doth no good: so there are many who let out their meditations upon other fruitless things which are no ways beneficial to their souls.

1. The farmer meditates on his acres of land, not upon his soul: his meditation is how he may improve a barren piece of ground, not how he may improve a barren mind: he will not let his ground lie fallow, but he lets his heart lie fallow: there is no spiritual culture, not one seed of grace sown there.

2. The physician meditates upon his receipts, but seldom on those receipts which the gospel prescribes for his salvation,—faith and repentance. Commonly the devil is physician to the physician, having given him such stupifying physic, that for the most part he dies of a lethargy.

3. The lawyer meditates upon the common law; but as for God's law he seldom meditates in it either day or night. The lawyer while he is meditating on his client's evidences, often forgets his own. Most of this robe have their spiritual evidences to seek, when they should have them to show.

4. The tradesman is for the most part meditating upon his wares and drugs: his study is how he may increase his estate, and make the ten talents a hundred. He is "cumbered about many things;" he doth not meditate in the book of God's law, but in his account book day and night. At the long run you will see these were fruitless meditations; you will find that you are but golden beggars, and have got but the fool's purchase when you die, Luke 12:20.

5. There is another sort that meditate only upon mischief, "who devise iniquity," Mic. 2:1. they meditate how to defame and to defraud; they make "the ephah small, and the shekel great," Amos 8:5. The ephah was a measure used in buying, the shekel a weight used in selling; they know how to collude and sophisticate. Christians who should support, too often supplant one another. And how many meditate revenge! it is sweet to them as dropping honey, as Homer speaks. "Their hearts shall meditate terror," Isa.

33:18. The sinner is a felon to himself, and God will make him a terror to himself, Jer. 20:4.

Chapter X — A holy persuasive to Meditation

Use 3. Of exhortation. I am in the next place to exhort Christians to this so necessary duty of meditation. If ever there be a duty I would press upon you with more earnestness and zeal, it should be this, because so much of the vitals and spirit of religion lies in it. The plant may as well bear fruit without watering, the meat may as well nourish without digesting, as we can fructify in holiness without meditation. God provides the meat, ministers can but cook and dress it for you. Meditation must make the concoction: for want of this you may cry out with the prophet, “My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me!” Isa. 24:16. O let me persuade such as fear God, seriously to set about this duty. If you have formerly neglected it, bewail your neglect, and now begin to make conscience of it. Lock up yourselves with God, at least once a day, by holy meditation. Ascend this hill, and when you are arrived at the top of it, you shall see a fair prospect, Christ and heaven before you. Let me put you in mind of that sweet saying of Bernard, “O saint, knowest thou not that thy husband Christ is bashful, and will not be familiar in company, retire thyself by meditation into the closet, or the field, and there thou shalt have Christ’s embraces.” “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field, there will I give thee my loves,” Cant. 7:11, 12. O that I could persuade Christians to this rare duty! Why is it that you do not meditate in God’s law let me expostulate the case with you; what is the reason? Methinks I hear some say, We are indeed convinced of the necessity of the duty, but alas there are many things that hinder. There are two great objections that lie in the way: I shall remove them, and then hope the better to persuade to this duty.

Chapter XI — The Answering of Objections

Objection 1. I have so much business in the world that I have no time to meditate.

Answer. The world indeed is a great enemy to meditation. It is easy to lose one's purse in a crowd; and in a crowd of worldly employments, it is easy to lose all the thoughts of God. So long as the heart is an exchange, I do not expect that it should be a temple: but, to answer the objection, hast thou so much business that thou hast no time for meditation? as if religion were but, by the by, a thing fit only for idle hours. What! no time to meditate! What is the business of thy life but meditation? God never sent us into the world to get riches. I speak not against labour in a calling; but I say this is not the end of our coming hither. The errand God sent us into the world about, is salvation; and that we may attain the end, we must use the means, namely, holy meditation. Now, hast thou no time to meditate? just as if a husbandman should say, truly he hath so much business that he hath no time to plough or sow! Why, what is his occupation but ploughing and sowing? What a madness is it to hear Christians say they have no time to meditate! What is the business of their lives but meditation? O take heed, lest by growing rich you grow worth nothing at last. Take heed that God doth not sue out the statute of bankruptcy against you, and you be disgraced before men and angels. No time for meditation! you shall observe that others in former ages have had as much business as you, and public affairs to look after, yet they were called upon to meditate; "Thou shalt meditate in this book of the law," Josh. 1:8. Joshua might have pleaded an excuse; he was a soldier, a commander, and the care of marshalling his army lay chiefly upon him, yet this must not take him off from religion; Joshua must meditate in the book of God's law. God never intended that the great business of religion should give way to a shop or farm; or that a particular calling should jostle out the general [calling].

Objection 2. But this duty of meditation is hard. To set time apart every day to get the heart into a meditating frame is very difficult. Gerson reports of himself, that he was sometimes three or four hours before he could work his heart into a spiritual frame.

Answer. Doth this hinder? To this I shall give a threefold reply.

1. The price that God hath set heaven at is labour; our salvation cost Christ blood, it may well cost us labour. "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence," Matt. 11:12. It is as a garrison that holds out, and the duties of religion are the taking it by storm. A good Christian must offer violence to himself; though not to natural self, yet to sinful self. Self is nothing but the flesh, Gal. 5:17. as Basil, Jerome, Theophylact, and Chrysostom, do all expound it. The flesh cries out for ease, it is a libertine; it is loth to take pains, loth to pray, to repent, loth to put its neck under Christ's yoke. Now a Christian must hate himself; no man ever yet hated his own flesh, Eph. 5:29. yes, in this sense he must hate his own flesh, "the lusts of the flesh," Rom. 8:13. He must offer violence to himself by mortification and meditation. Say not it is hard to meditate, is it not harder to lie in hell?

2. We do not argue so in other things. Riches are hard to come by, therefore I will sit still and be with out them: no, difficulty is the whetstone of industry. How will men venture for gold! and shall we not spend and be spent for that which is more precious than the gold of Ophir? by meditation we suck out the quintessence of a promise.

3. Though while we are first entering upon meditation it may seem hard, yet, when once we are entered, it is sweet and pleasant. Christ's yoke at the first putting on may seem heavy; but when once it is on it becomes easy; it is not a yoke, but a crown. Lord, saith Austin, the more I meditate on thee, the sweeter thou art to me. According to that of holy David, "My meditation of thee shall be sweet," Psa. 104:34. The poets say, the top of Olympus was always quiet and serene: it is hard climbing up the rocky hill of meditation, but when we are got up to the top, there is a pleasant prospect, and we shall sometimes think ourselves even in heaven. By holy meditation the soul doth, as it were, breakfast with God every morning; and to be sure his breakfast is better than his dinner. When a Christian is upon the mount of meditation, he is like Peter on the mount when Christ was transfigured, Matt. 17:4. he cries out, "Lord, it is good to be

here:” he is loth to go down the mount again. If you come to him, and tell him of a purchase, he thinks you bid him to his loss: what hidden manna doth the soul taste now! how sweet are the visits of God’s Spirit! When Christ was alone in the wilderness, then the angel came to comfort him; when the soul is alone in holy meditations and ejaculations, then not an angel, but God’s own Spirit doth come to comfort him. A Christian that meets with God in the mount, would not exchange his hours of meditation for the most orient pearls or sparkling beauties that the world can afford. No wonder David spent the whole day in meditation, Psa. 119:97. Nay, as if the day had been too little, he borrows a part of the night too; “When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches,” Psa. 63:6. When others were sleeping, David was meditating. He who is given much to meditation, shall, with Samson, find a honeycomb in this duty: therefore let not the difficulty discourage. The pleasantness will infinitely countervail the pains.

Having removed these two objections out of the way, let me again revive the exhortation to “meditate in God’s law day and night.” And there are two sorts of meditation which I would persuade to.

Chapter XII — Concerning occasional Meditations

1. Occasional, and 2. Deliberate.

1. Occasional meditations; such as are taken up on any sudden occasion. There is hardly any thing doth occur, but we may presently raise some meditation upon: as a good herbalist doth extract the spirits and quintessence out of every herb, so a Christian may from every emergence and occurrence extract matter of meditation. A gracious heart, like fire, turns all objects into fuel for meditation. I shall give you some instances. When you look up to the heavens, and see them richly embroidered with light, you may raise this meditation: If the footstool be so glorious, what is the throne where God himself sits? When you see the firmament bespangled with stars, think, what is Christ, the bright Morning Star! Rev. 22:16. Monica, Austin’s mother,

standing one day, and seeing the sun shine, raised this meditation: Oh! if the sun be so bright, what is the light of God's presence! When you hear music that delights the senses, presently raise this meditation: What music like a good conscience; this is the bird of paradise within, whose chirping melody doth enchant and ravish the soul with joy; he that hath this music all day, may take David's pillow at night, and say with that sweet singer, "I will lay me down in peace and sleep," Psa. 4:8. How blessed is he who can find heaven in his own bosom! When you are dressing yourselves in the morning, awaken your meditation, think thus, But have I been dressing the hidden man of the heart? 1 Pet. 3:4. have I looked at my face in the glass of God's word? I have put on my clothes, but have I put on Christ? It is reported of Pambo, that seeing a gentlewoman dressing herself all the morning by her glass, he fell a weeping: Oh, saith he, this woman hath spent the morning in dressing her body, and I sometimes spend scarce an hour in dressing my soul! When you sit down to dinner, let your meditation feed upon this first course, How blessed are they who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God! What a royal feast will that be which hath God for the founder! What a love-feast where none shall be admitted but friends!

When you go to bed at night, imagine thus: Shortly I shall put off the earthly clothes of my body, and make my bed in the grave. When you see the judge going to the assizes, and hear the trumpet blow, think with yourselves, as Jerome did, that you are hearing that shrill trumpet sounding in your ears, "Arise ye dead, and come to judgment." When you see a poor man going in the streets, raise this meditation: Here is a walking picture of Christ, "He had no place where to lay his head," Matt. 8:20. My Saviour became poor, that I through his poverty might be made rich. When you go to church, think thus: I am now going to hear God speak, let me not stop my ear; if I refuse to hear him speaking in his word, I shall next hear him speaking in his wrath, Psa. 2:5. When you walk abroad in your orchard, and see the plants bearing, and the herbs flourishing, think how pleasing a sight it is to God to see a thriving Christian; how beautiful are the trees of

righteousness when they are hung full of fruit, Phil. 1:11. when they abound in faith, humility, knowledge! When you pluck a rose bud in your garden, raise this contemplation: How lovely are the early puttings forth of grace! God prizeth a Christian in the bud, he likes the bloomings of youth rather than the sheddings of old age. When you eat a grape from the tree, think of Christ the true vine; how precious is the blood of that grape! such rare clusters grow there, that the angels themselves delight to taste of them. It is said of Austin, that he was much in these extempore meditations. A gracious heart, like the philosopher's stone, turns all into gold. It is stilling time all the year with a Christian; he stilleth out heavenly meditations from earthly occurrences. As the curious alchemist, when several metals are mingled together, can by his skill extract the gold and silver from the baser metals; so a Christian, by a divine alchemy, can extract golden meditations from the various objects he beholds, Indeed it argues a spiritual heart, to turn every thing to a spiritual use; and we have Christ's own example for these occasional meditations, John 4:7, 10, 13, 14. While he sat on Jacob's well, he presently meditates on that, and breaks forth into a most excellent discourse concerning the water of life. So much for occasional meditations.

2. Be exhorted to deliberate meditations, which are the chief. Set some time apart every day, that you may, in a serious and solemn manner, converse with God in the mount. A godly man is a man set apart, Psa. 4:3. as God sets him apart by election, so he sets himself apart by meditation.

Chapter XIII — For the right timing of Meditation

Question 1. What is the fittest time for meditation?

Answer. For the timing of it, it is hard to prescribe, because of men's various callings and employments. But, if I may freely speak my thoughts, the morning is the fittest time for meditation. The best time to converse with God is, when we may be most private; that is, before worldly occasions stand knocking as so many suitors at the door to be let in: the morning is, as it were, the cream of the day; let the cream be taken off, and let God have it.

In the distilling of strong water, the first water that is drawn from the still is more full of spirits, the second drawing is weaker; so the first meditations that are stilled from the mind in a morning are the best, and we shall find them to be most full of life and spirits. The morning is the golden hour. God loved the first-fruits; “The first of the first-fruits thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord,” Exod. 23:19. Let God have the first-fruits of the day; the first of our thoughts must be set upon heaven. The student takes the morning for his study. The usurer gets up in the morning and looks over his books of account. A Christian must begin with God in the morning. David was with God before break of day; “I prevented the dawning of the morning,” Psa. 119:147.

Question 2. But why the morning for meditation?

Answer 1. Because in the morning the mind is fittest for holy duties; a Christian is most himself then. What weary devotion will there be at night when a man is quite tired out with the business of the day! he will be fitter to sleep than to meditate. The morning is the queen of the day; then the fancy is quickest, the memory strongest, the spirits freshest, the organ of the body most disposed, having been recruited by sleep. It is a sure rule, then is the best time to serve God, when we find ourselves most in tune. In the morning the heart is like a viol strung and put in tune, and then it makes the sweetest melody.

Answer 2. The morning thoughts stay longest with us the day after; the wool takes the first dye best, and it is not easily worn out. When the mind receives the impression of good thoughts in the morning, it holds this sacred dye the better; and, like a colour in grain, it will not easily be lost. The heart keeps the relish of morning meditations, as a vessel that receives a tincture and savour of the wine that is first put into it; or as a chest of sweet linen, that keeps the scent a great while after. Perfume thy mind with heavenly thoughts in the morning, and it will not lose its spiritual fragranc y. Wind up thy heart towards heaven in the beginning of the day, and it will go the better all the day after. It is with receiving thoughts into the mind, as it is with receiving

guests into an inn: the first guests that come fill the best rooms in the house; if others come after, worse rooms will serve them; so, when the mind entertains holy meditations for its morning-guests, if afterwards earthly thoughts come, they are put into some of the worst rooms, they lodge lowest in the affections. The best rooms are taken up in the morning for Christ. He that loseth his heart in the morning in the world, will hardly find it again all the day after.

Answer 3. It is a part of that solemn respect and honour we give to God, to let him have the first thoughts of the day: we give persons of quality the precedency, we let them take the first place. If we honour God, whose name is reverend and holy, we shall let the thoughts of God take place of [before] all other. When the world hath the first of our thoughts, it is a sign the world lies uppermost, we love it most. The first thing a covetous man meditates on in the morning, is his money; a sign his gold lies nearest to his heart. O Christians, let God have your morning meditations! It displeases God to have the world served before him. Suppose a king and a yeoman were to dine in the same room, and to sit at two tables; if the yeoman should have his meat brought up, and be served first, the king might well be displeased, and look upon it as a contempt done to his person. When the world shall be served first, all our morning thoughts attending it, and the Lord shall be put off with the dregs of the day, when our thoughts begin to run low, is not this a contempt done to the God of glory.

Answer 4. Equity requires it. God deserves the first of our thoughts. We had a being in his thoughts before we had a being; he thought upon us “before the foundations of the world,” Eph. 1:4. Before we fell, he was thinking how to raise us. We had the morning of his thoughts. Oh! what thoughts of free grace, what thoughts of peace hath he had towards us! we have taken up his thoughts from eternity: if we have had some of God’s first thoughts, well may he have our first thoughts

Answer 5. This is to imitate the pattern of the saints. Job rose early in the morning, and offered, Job 1:5. David when he awaked

was with God, Psa. 139:18. and indeed this is the way to have a morning blessing. “In the morning the dew fell,” Exod. 16:13. The dew of a blessing falls early; now we are likeliest to have God’s company. If you would meet with a friend, you go betimes in the morning before he be gone out. We read that the Holy Ghost came down upon the apostles, Acts 2:3, 4. and it was in the morning, as may be gathered from Peter’s sermon, verse 15. it was but “the third hour of the day.” The morning is the time for fruitfulness, “In the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish,” Isa. 17:11. By morning meditation, we make the seed of grace to flourish.

I would not by this wholly exclude evening meditation. Isaac went out to meditate in the even-tide, Gen. 24:63. When business is over, and every thing calm, it is good to take a turn with God in the evening. God had his evening sacrifice, as well as his morning, Exod. 29:39. As the cream at the top is sweet, so likewise the sugar at the bottom. In two cases, the evening meditation doth well.

1. In case such hath been the urgency of business, that thou hast time only for reading and prayer; then recompense the want of the morning with evening meditation.

2. In case thou findest thyself more inclined to good thoughts in the evening; for sometimes there is a greater *impetus* [Desire, ardour, force] upon the heart, a greater aptitude and tuneableness of mind; dare not neglect meditation at such a time. Who knows but it may be a quenching the Spirit! Do not drive this blessed dove from the ark of thy soul. In these cases evening meditation is seasonable. But I say, if I may cast in my verdict, the morning is to be preferred. As the flower of the sun opens in the morning to take in the sweet beams of the sun, so open thy soul in the morning to take in the sweet thoughts of God. And so much for the timing of meditation.

Chapter XIV — How long Christians should be conversant with this Duty

Question. But how long should I meditate?

Answer. If we consider how much of our time is given to the world, it is hard if we cannot give God at least one half hour every day. I shall only say this for a general rule. Meditate till thou findest thy heart grow warm in this duty.

If, when a man is cold, you ask how long he should stand by the fire? Surely, till he be thoroughly warm, and made fit for his work. So, Christian, thy heart is cold; never a day, no, not the hottest day in summer, but it freezeth there. Now stand at the fire of meditation till thou findest thy affections warmed, and thou art made more fit for spiritual service. David mused till his heart waxed hot within him, Psa. 39:3. I will conclude this with that excellent saying of Bernard, “Lord, I will never come away from thee without thee.” Let this be a Christian’s resolution not to leave off his meditations of God till he find something of God in him: some ardent desires after God, Cant. 5:4. some “flamings of love,” Cant. 5:8.

Chapter XV — Concerning the usefulness of Meditation

Having answered these questions, I shall next show the benefit and usefulness of meditation.

I know not any duty that brings in greater income and revenue than this. It is reported of Thales, that he left the affairs of state to become a contemplating philosopher. O! did we know the advantage which is gained by this duty, we would often retire from the noise and hurry of the world, that we might give ourselves to meditation.

The benefit of meditation appears in seven particulars.

I. Meditation is an excellent means to profit by the word. Reading may bring a truth into the head; meditation brings it into the heart. Better meditate on one sermon than hear five. I observe many put up their bills [protests] in our congregations, and complain that they cannot profit; may not this be the chief reason, because they chew not the cud, they do not meditate on what they have heard. If an angel should come from heaven, and preach to

men, nay, if Jesus Christ himself were their preacher, they would never profit without meditation. It is the settling of the milk that makes it turn to cream; and it is the settling of a truth in the mind, that makes it turn to spiritual aliment [food]. The bee sucks the flower, and then works it in the hive, and makes honey of it: the hearing of a truth preached is the sucking of a flower; there must be a working it in the hive of the heart by meditation, before it will turn to honey. There is a disease in children called the rickets, when they have great heads, but their lower parts are small and thrive not. I wish many of the professors in London have not the spiritual rickets, they have great heads, much knowledge, but yet they thrive not in godliness, their heart is faint, their feet feeble, they walk not vigorously in the ways of God; and the cause of this disease is, the want of meditation. Illumination without meditation makes us no better than devils. Satan is an angel of light, yet black enough.

II. Meditation doth make the heart serious, and then it is ever best. Meditation doth ballast the heart: when the ship is ballasted, it is not so soon overturned by the wind; and when the heart is ballasted with meditation, it is not so soon overturned with vanity. Some Christians have light hearts, “his prophets are light.” Zeph. 3:4. A light Christian will be blown into any opinion or vice; you may blow a feather any way: there are many feathery Christians; the devil no sooner comes with a temptation, but they are ready to take fire. Now meditation makes the heart serious, and God saith of a serious Christian, as David of Goliath’s sword, “there is none like that, give it me.” Meditation consolidates a Christian. Solid gold is best; the solid Christian is the only metal that will pass current with God. The more serious the heart grows, the more spiritual; and the more spiritual, the more it resembles the Father of spirits. When a man is serious, he is fittest for employment. The serious Christian is fittest for service, and it is meditation brings the heart into this blessed frame.

III. Meditation is the bellows of the affections. Meditation hatcheth good affections, as the hen her young ones, by sitting on

them. We light affection at this fire of meditation; “While I was musing the fire burned,” Psa. 39:3. David was meditating on mortality, and see how his heart was affected with it, verse 4. “Lord, make me to know mine end and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am.” The reason our affections are so chill and cold in spiritual things, is, because we do not warm ourselves more at the fire of meditation. Illumination makes us shining lamps; meditation makes us burning lamps. What is it to know Christ by speculation, and not by affection! It is the proper work of meditation to excite and blow up holy passions. What sparklings of love in such a soul! When David had meditated on God’s law, he could not fail to love it, “Oh how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day,” Psa. 119:97. When the spouse had by meditation viewed those singular beauties in her beloved, white and ruddy, Cant. 5. she grew sick of love, verse 8. Galeatius Caraccialus, that famous marquis of Vico, who had been engaged much in the contemplation of Christ, breaks out into a holy pathos, Let their money perish with them, who esteem all the gold in the world worth one hour’s communion with Jesus Christ!

IV. Meditation fits for holy duties. The musician first puts his instrument in tune, and then he plays a lesson; meditation tunes the heart, and then it is fit for any holy service. As the sails to the ship, so is meditation to duty, it carries on the soul more swiftly.

1. Meditation fits for hearing. When the ground is softened by meditation [the frost], then it is fit for the plough and the seed; when the heart is softened by meditation, then is a fit time for the seed of the word to be sown.

2. Meditation fits for prayer. Prayer is the spiritual pulse of the soul, by which it beats strongly after God. There is no living without prayer. A man cannot live, unless he takes breath; no more can the soul, unless it breathes out its desires to God. Prayer ushers in mercy, and prayer sanctifies mercy, 1 Tim. 4:5. it makes mercy to be mercy. Prayer hath power over God, Hos. 12:4. Prayer comes with letters of *mandamus* [requests] to

heaven, Isa. 45:11. Prayer is the spiritual leech that sucks the poison of sin out of the soul. What a blessed (shall I say duty or) privilege is prayer! Now meditation is a help to prayer; Gerson calls it the nurse of prayer. Meditation is like oil to the lamp; the lamp of prayer will soon go out, unless meditation cherish and support it. Meditation and prayer are like two turtles; if you separate one, the other dies. A cunning angler observes the time and season when the fish bite best, and then he throws in his angle [hook]: when the heart is warmed by meditation, then is the best season to throw in the angle [hook] of prayer, and fish for mercy. After Isaac had been in the field meditating, he was fit for prayer when he came home. When the gun is full of powder, it is fittest to discharge. So when the mind is full of good thoughts, a Christian is fittest by prayer to discharge; then he sends up whole volleys of sighs and groans to heaven. Meditation hath a double benefit in it, it pours in, and pours out: first it pours good thoughts into the mind, and then it pours out those thoughts again in prayer. Meditation first furnishes with matter to pray, and then it furnishes with a heart to pray, Psa. 39:3. "I was musing," saith David, and the very next words are a prayer, "Lord make me to know my end;" and, "I muse on the works of thy hands, I stretch forth my hands to thee;" Psa. 143:5, 6, the musing of his head made way for the stretching forth of his hands in prayer. When Christ was upon the mount, then he prayed: so when the soul is upon the mount of meditation, then it is in tune for prayer. Prayer is the child of meditation: meditation leads the van, and prayer brings up the rear.

3. Meditation fits for humiliation. When David had been contemplating the works of creation, their splendour, harmony, motion, influence, he lets the plumes of pride fall, and begins to have self-abasing thoughts, "When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars which thou hast ordained, What is man that thou art mindful of him!" Psa. 8:3, 4.

V. Meditation is a strong antidote against sin. Most sin is committed for want of meditation: men sin through thoughtlessness and passion. Would they be so brutishly sensual

as they are, if they did seriously meditate what sin is? Would they take this viper in their hand, if they did but consider before of the sting? Sin puts a worm into conscience, a sting into death, a fire into hell. Did men meditate on this, that after all their dainty dishes, death will bring in the reckoning, and that they must pay the reckoning in hell, they would say as David, in another sense, "Let me not eat of their dainties," Psa. 141:4. The devil's apple hath a bitter core in it. Did men think of this, surely it would put them into a cold sweat, and be as the angel's drawn sword to affright them. Meditation is a golden shield to beat back sin. When Joseph's mistress tempted him to wickedness, meditation preserved him, "How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Meditation makes the heart like wet tinder, it will not take the devil's fire.

VI. Meditation is a cure of covetousness. The covetous man is called an idolater, Col. 3:5. Though he will not bow down to an idol, yet he worships graven images in his coin. Now meditation is an excellent means to lessen our esteem of the world. Great things seem little to him who stands high: if he could live among the stars, the earth would seem as nothing. A Christian who stands high upon the pinnacle of meditation, how do all worldly things disappear, and seem as nothing to him! He sees not that in them, which men of the world do. He is got into his tower, and heaven is his prospect. What is said of God, I may allude to with reverence: "He dwelleth on high, he humbleth himself to behold the things done on the earth," Psa. 113:5, 6. The Christian that dwelleth on high by meditation, accounts it a humbling and abasing of himself to look down upon the earth, and behold the things done in this lower region. Saint Paul, whose meditations were sublime and seraphical, looked at things which were not seen, 2 Cor. 4:18. How did he trample upon the world! how did he scorn it! "I am crucified to the world," Gal. 6:14. as if he had said, it is too much below me to mind it. He who is catching at a crown, will not fish for gudgeons [small fish used as bait], as Cleopatra once said to Mark Antony. A Christian who is elevated

by holy meditation, will not set his heart where his feet should be, upon the earth.

VII. Holy meditation banishes vain and sinful thoughts; it purifies the fancy; “How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee,” Jer. 4:14. The mind is the shop or workhouse where sin is first framed. Sin begins at the thoughts. The thoughts are the first plotters and contrivers of evil. The mind and fancy is a stage where sin is first acted; the malicious man acts over sin in his thoughts, he contemplates revenge. The impure person acts over concupiscence in his thoughts, he contemplates lust. The Lord humbles us for our contemplative wickedness, “If thou hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth,” Prov. 30:32. How much sin do men commit in the chamber of their imagination! Now meditating in God’s law would be a good means to banish these sinful thoughts. If David had carried the book of the law about him, and meditated in it, he had not looked on Bathsheba with a lascivious eye, 2 Sam. 11:2. Holy meditation would have quenched that wild-fire of lust. The word of God is pure, Psa. 119:140. not only subjective, but effective. It is not only pure in itself, but it makes them pure that meditate in it. Christ whipped the buyers and sellers out of the temple, John 2:15. Holy meditation would whip out idle and vagrant thoughts, and not suffer them to lodge in the mind. What is the reason the angels in heaven have not a vain thought? They have a sight of God, their eye is never off him. If the eye of the soul were fixed on God by meditation, how would vain impure thoughts vanish! As when that woman, Judg. 9:53. was in the tower, and Abimelech came near to the tower to enter it, she threw a millstone out of the tower upon him, and killed him: so when we are entered into the high tower of meditation, and sinful thoughts would come near to enter, we may from this tower throw a millstone upon them, and destroy them. And thus you have seen the benefit of meditation.

Chapter XVI — Setting forth the Excellency of Meditation

Aristotle places felicity in the contemplation of the mind.

Meditation is highly commended by Austin, Chrysostom, Cyprian, as the nursery of piety. Jerome calls it his paradise; with what words shall I set it forth? Other duties have done excellently; but “thou excellest them all.” Meditation is a friend to the graces; it helps to water the plantation. I may call it, in Basil’s expression, the treasury where all the graces are locked up; and, with Theophylact, the very gate and portal by which we enter into glory. By meditation the spirits are raised and heightened to a kind of angelical frame. Meditation doth sweetly anticipate happiness, it puts us in heaven before our time. Meditation brings God and the soul together, 1 John 3:2.

Meditation is the saints’ perspective glass [telescope], by which they see things invisible. It is the golden ladder by which they ascend paradise; it is the spy they send abroad to search the land of promise, and it brings a bunch of grapes with it; it is the dove they send out, and it brings an olive branch of peace in its mouth; but who can tell how sweet honey is, save they that taste it? The excellency of meditation I leave to experienced Christians, who will say the comfort of it may be better felt than expressed.

To excite all to this pancreston, [Universal remedy, precious for all] to this so useful, excellent, I had almost said angelical, duty, let me lay down some divine motives to meditation; and how glad should I be if I could revive this duty among Christians.

Chapter XVII — Containing divine motives to Meditation

Motive 1. Meditation doth discriminate and characterize a man; by this he may take a measure of his heart, whether it be good or bad; let me allude to that; “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he,” Prov. 23:7. as the meditation is, such is the man. Meditation is the touchstone of a Christian; it shows what metal he is made of. It is a spiritual index; the index shows what is in the book, so meditation shows what is in the heart. If all a man’s meditations are how he may get power against sin, how he may grow in grace, how he may have more communion with God, this shows what is in his heart; the frame of his heart is spiritual; by the beating of

this pulse, judge of the health of thy soul. It is the character of a godly man; he fears God, and thinks “upon his name,” Mal. 3:16. Whereas if the thoughts are taken up with pride and lust, as are the thoughts, such is the heart; “their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,” Isa. 59:7. When vain sinful thoughts come, men make much of them, they make room for them, they shall diet and lodge with them; if a good thought chance to come into their mind, it is soon turned out of doors, as an unwelcome guest. What need we further witness? this argues much unsoundness of heart; let this provoke to holy meditation.

Motive 2. The thoughts of God, as they bring delight with them, so they leave peace behind: those are the best hours which are spent with God. Conscience, as the bee, gives honey; it will not grieve us when we come to die, that we have spent our time in holy soliloquies and ejaculations [exclamations]. But what honour will the sinner have, when he shall ask conscience the question, as Joram did Jehu, 2 Kings 9:22. Is it peace, conscience, is it peace? and conscience shall say, as Jehu, “What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many?” Oh how sad will it be with a man at such a time! Christians, as you tender your peace, “meditate in God’s law day and night.”

This duty of meditation being neglected, the heart will run wild, it will not be a vineyard, but a wilderness.

Motive 3. Meditation keeps the heart in a good decorum. It plucks up the weeds of sin, it prunes the luxuriant branches, it waters the flowers of grace, it sweeps all the walks in the heart, that Christ may walk there with delight. For want of holy meditation the heart lies like the sluggard’s field, Prov. 24:31. all overgrown with thorns and briars, unclean earthly thoughts. It is rather the devil’s hogstye, than Christ’s garden. It is like a house fallen to ruin, fit only for unclean spirits to inhabit.

Motive 4. The fruitlessness of all other meditations. One man lays out his thoughts about laying up; his meditations are how to

raise himself in the world, and when he hath arrived at an estate, often God blows upon it, Hag. 1:9. His care is for his child, and perhaps God takes it away; or if it lives, it proves a cross. Another meditates how to satisfy his ambition. "Honour me before the people," 1 Sam. 15:30. Alas, what is honour but a meteor in the air; a torch lighted by the breath of people, with the least puff blown out! how many live to see their names buried before them! When this sun is in the meridian, it doth soon set in a cloud.

Thus fruitless are those meditations which do not centre upon God. It is but to carry dust against the wind. But especially at death; then a man sees all those thoughts which were not spent upon God to be fruitless, "In that very day his thoughts perish," Psa. 146:4. I may allude to it in this sense; all worldly, vain thoughts in that day of death perish, and come to nothing: what good will the whole globe of the world do at such a time? Those who have revelled out their thoughts in impertinencies [irrelevancies] will but be the more disquieted; it will cut them to the heart to think how they have spun a fool's thread. A Scythian captain having, for a draught of water, yielded up the city, cried out, What have I lost? what have I betrayed? So will it be with that man when he comes to die, who hath spent all his meditations upon the world; he will say, What have I lost? what have I betrayed? I have lost heaven, I have betrayed my soul. And should not the consideration of this fix our minds upon the thoughts of God and glory? All other meditations are fruitless; like a piece of ground which hath much cost laid out upon it, but it yields no crop.

Motive 5. Holy meditation is not lost. God hath a pen to write down all our good thoughts, "A book of remembrance was written for them that thought upon his name," Mal. 3:16. As God hath all our members, so all our meditations, written in his book. God pens our closet devotion.

Motive 6. The sixth motive is in the text, namely, the blessedness affixed to the meditating Christian, "Blessed is the man," &c. verse 1. Say not it is hard to meditate. What think you

of blessedness? Lycurgus could draw the Lacedemonians to any thing by rewards. If men can meditate with delight on that which will make them cursed, shall not we meditate on that which will make us blessed? nay, in the Hebrew it is in the plural, blessednesses; we shall have one blessedness upon another.

Motive 7. Lastly, delightful meditation in God's law is the best way for a man to prosper in his estate. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous," Josh. 1:8. I leave this to their consideration who are desirous to thrive in the world; and let this serve for a motive to meditation.

The next thing remaining, is, to lay down some rules about meditation.

Chapter XVIII — Prescribing Rules about Meditation

Rule 1. When thou goest to meditate be very serious in the work. Let there be a deep impression upon thy soul; and that thou mayest be serious in meditation, do these two things: 1. Get thyself into a posture of holy reverence. Overawe thy heart with the thoughts of God, and the incomprehensibleness of his majesty. When thou art at the work of meditation, remember thou art now to deal with God. If an angel from heaven did appoint to meet thee at such an hour, wouldst thou not address thyself with all seriousness and solemnity to meet him? Behold a greater than an angel is here; the God of glory is present: he hath an eye upon thee, he sees the carriage of thy heart when thou art alone. Think with thyself, O Christian! when thou art going to meditate, that thou art now to deal with him in private whom the angels adore, and before whom the devils tremble. Think with thyself, that thou art now in his presence before whom thou must shortly stand, and all the world with thee, to receive their doom. Thou must be removed, and how soon thou knowest not, from the closet to the tribunal.

2. That thy heart may be serious in meditation, labour to possess thy thoughts with the solemnity and greatness of the

work thou art now going about. David said concerning his building a house for God, “the work is great,” 1 Chron. 29:1. so it may be said of meditation, the work is great, and we had need gather and rally together all the powers of the soul to the work. If thou wert to set about a business wherein thy life were concerned, how serious wouldst thou be in the thoughts of it! In the business of meditation thy soul is concerned; eternity depends upon it; if thou neglect, or art slight in it, thou runnest a hazard of thy salvation. If Archimedes was so serious in drawing his mathematical line, that he minded not the sacking of the city, oh how serious should a Christian be when he is drawing a line for eternity! When thou art going to meditate, thou art going about the greatest work in the world.

Rule 2. Read before you meditate. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate in it,” Josh. 1:8. The law must be in Joshua’s mouth; he was first to read and then meditate; “Give attendance to reading,” 1 Tim. 4:13. Then it follows, “meditate on these things,” verse 15. Reading doth furnish with matter; it is the oil that feeds the lamp of meditation. Reading helps to rectify meditation. Austin saith well, that meditation without reading will be erroneous. Naturally the mind is defiled as well as the conscience, Tit. 1:15. the mind will be minting [Coining] thoughts, and how many untruths doth it mint! therefore first read in the book of the law, and then meditate: be sure your meditations be grounded upon scripture. There is a strange Utopia in the fancies of some men; they take those for true principles which are false; and if they mistake their principles, they must needs be wrong in their meditations. He that is of the sadducees’ opinion, that there is no resurrection, mistakes a principle; now while he is meditating on this, he is at last carried to direct atheism. He that is of the antinomians’ opinion, that there is no law to a justified person, mistakes a principle, and while he is meditating on this, he at last falls into scandal. Thus the mind having laid in wrong principles, and taking that for a truth which is not, the meditation must needs be

erroneous, and a man at last goes to hell upon a mistake; therefore be sure you read before you meditate, that you may say, it is written. Meditate on nothing but what you believe to be a truth; believe nothing to be a truth, but what can show its letters of credence from the word. Observe this rule, let reading usher in meditation: reading without meditation is unfruitful; meditation without reading is dangerous.

Rule 3. Do not multiply the subjects of meditation; that is, meditate not on too many things at once; like the bird that hops from one bough to another, and stays no where: single out rather some one head at a time, which you will meditate upon. Too much variety distracts. One truth driven home by meditation will most kindly affect the heart. A man that is to shoot, sets up one mark that he aims at to hit: when thou art to shoot thy mind above the world by meditation, set one thing before thee to hit. If thou art to meditate on the passion of Christ, let that take up all thy thoughts; if upon death, confine thy thoughts to that: one subject at a time is enough. Martha while she was cumbered about many things, neglected the one thing; so while our meditations are taken up about many things, we lose that one thing which should affect our hearts, and do us more good. Drive but one wedge of meditation at a time, but be sure you drive it home to the heart. Those who aim at a whole flock of birds hit none. When several medicines are applied together, the one hinders the virtue of the other; whereas a single medicine might do good.

Rule, 4. To meditation join examination. When you have been meditating on any spiritual subject, put a query to thy soul, and though it be short, let it be serious. O my soul! is it thus with thee or not? When thou hast been meditating about the fear of God, that is the “beginning of wisdom,” Prov. 1:7. put a query, O my soul! is this fear planted in thy heart? thou art almost come to the end of thy days, art thou yet come to the beginning of wisdom? When thou hast been meditating on Christ, his virtues, his privileges, put a query, O my soul! dost thou love Him who is so lovely, Cant. 5:16. and art thou engrafted into him? art thou a

living branch of this living vine! When thou hast been meditating upon the graces of the Spirit, put a query, O my soul! art thou adorned as the bride of Christ with this chain of pearl? hast thou thy certificate for heaven ready? will not thy graces be to seek when thou shouldst have them to show! Thus should a Christian, in his retirements, parley often with his heart.

For want of this examination, meditation doth evaporate and come to nothing. For want of examination joined with meditation, many are strangers to their own hearts; though they live known to others, they die unknown to themselves. Meditation is like a perspective glass by which we contemplate heavenly objects; but self-examination is like a looking-glass by which we see into our own souls, and can judge how it is with us. Meditation joined with examination, is like the sun on the dial, which shows how the day goes; it shows us how our hearts stand affected to spiritual things.

Rule 5. Shut up meditation with prayer; pray over your meditations. Prayer sanctifies every thing; without prayer they are but unhallowed meditations; prayer fastens meditation upon the soul; prayer is a tying a knot at the end of meditation, that it doth not slip; pray that God will keep those holy meditations in your mind for ever, that the savour of them may abide upon your hearts; “O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people,” 1 Chron. 29:18. So let us pray, that when we have been musing on heavenly things, and our hearts have waxed hot within us, we may not cool into a sinful tepidness and lukewarmness, but that our affections may be as the lamp of the sanctuary, always burning.

Rule 6. The last rule is, let meditation be reduced to practice; live over your meditation. “Thou shalt meditate in this book, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein,” Josh. 1:8. Meditation and practice, like two sisters, must go hand in hand. Cassian saith, that the contemplative life cannot be perfected without the practice. We read that the angels had wings,

and hands under their wings, Ezek. 1:8. it may be an hieroglyphical emblem of this truth; Christians must not only fly upon the wing of meditation, but they must be active in obedience; they must have hands under their wings. The end of meditation is action. We must not only meditate in God's law but walk in his law, Deut. 28:9. Without this we are like those gnostics, of whom Epithanius complains, they had much knowledge, but were in their lives licentious. Christians must be like the sun, which doth not only send forth heat, but goes its circuit round the world. It is not enough that the affections be heated by meditation, but we must go our circuit too; that is, move regularly in the sphere of obedience. After warming at the fire of meditation, we must be fitter for work. Meditation is the life of religion, and practice is the life of meditation. It is said to the honour of Nazianzen, that he lived over his own sermons. So a good Christian must live over his own meditations.

For instance: 1. When you have been meditating on sin, which, for its bitterness, is compared to grapes of gall, for its damnableness, to poison of asps, and you begin to burn in a holy indignation against sin, now put your meditations in practice, give sin a bill of divorce; "If iniquity be in thy hand, put it far away, and let not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles," Job. 11:14.

2. When you have been meditating on the graces of the Spirit, let the verdure and lustre of these graces be seen in you; live these graces; meditate, "that you may observe and do." It was St. Paul's counsel to Timothy, "Exercise thyself unto godliness," 1 Tim. 4:7. Meditation and practice are like a pair of compasses; the one part of the compass fixeth upon the centre, and the other part goes round the circumference: a Christian by meditation fixeth upon God as the centre, and by practice goes round the circumference of the commandments. A man who hath let his thoughts run out upon riches, will not only have them in the notion, but will endeavour to get riches. Let your meditations be practical: when you have been meditating upon a promise, live upon a promise; when you have been meditating on a good conscience, never leave till you can say as Paul, "Herein I exercise myself, to have a

good conscience,” Acts 24:16. Beloved, here lies the very essence of religion.

That this rule may be well observed, consider, 1. It is only the practical part of religion will make a man blessed. Meditation is a beautiful flower, but, as Rachel said to her husband, “Give me children, or I die,” Gen. 30:1. So, if meditation be barren, and doth not bring forth the child of obedience, it will die and come to nothing.

2. If when you have meditated in God’s law, you do not obey his law, you will come short of them who have come short of heaven. It is said of Herod, “He did many things,” Mark 6:20. he was in many things a practiser of John’s ministry. They who meditate in God’s law, and observe not to do, are not so good as Herod; nay, they are no better than the devil; he knows much, but still he is a devil.

3. Meditation without practice will increase a man’s condemnation. If a father write a letter to his son, and the son shall read over this letter, and study it, yet not observe to do as his father writes, this would be an aggravation of his fault, and would but provoke his father so much the more against him. Thus, when we have meditated upon the evil of sin, and the beauty of holiness, yet if we do not eschew the one, nor espouse the other, it will but incense the Divine Majesty so much the more against us, and we shall “be beaten with many stripes.”

The third of four booklets.

“His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he doth meditate day and night” Psalm 1:2.



“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles” Isaiah 40:31.