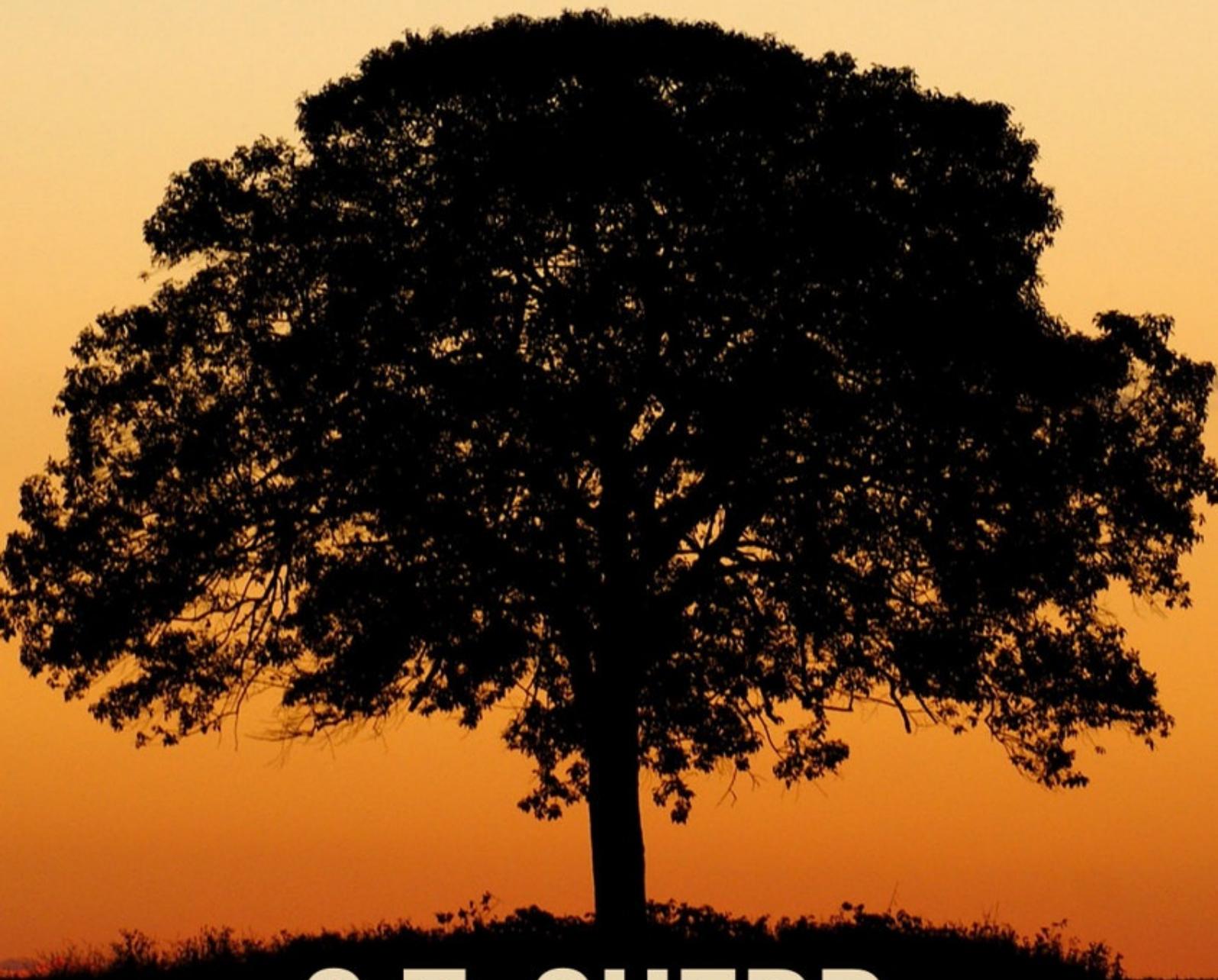


# SERMONS TO THE SPIRITUAL MAN



**G.T. SHEDD**

SERMONS  
TO THE  
SPIRITUAL MAN  
BY  
WILLIAM G. T. SHEDD, D.D.

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THIS volume is complementary to another, published in 1871, under the title of "Sermons to the Natural Man." In the earlier volume, the author aimed to address the human conscience. In this, he would speak to the Christian heart. The former supposed original and unpardoned sin, and endeavored to produce the consciousness of it. The latter supposes forgiven and indwelling sin, and would aid in the struggle and victory over it. The writer has had evidence, both from this country and from abroad, that theological sermonizing and the close application of truth are not so unwelcome and unpopular, as they are sometimes represented to be. This encourages him to hope that the present volume, which takes a wider range, and brings to view the experiences and aspirations of the regenerate believer, may find a yet larger class of sympathetic readers. At the same time, the author is well aware that both volumes are out of all keeping with some existing tendencies in the religious world. But these tendencies are destined to disappear, whenever the blind guides shall cease to lead the blind, and honest self-knowledge shall take the place of self-flattery and religious delusion. That this will happen, is as certain as that the Holy Spirit has not forsaken the world for which God incarnate died, but will, in His own way, again search and illumine the human soul, as in "the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

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# SERMON I. RELIGIOUS MEDITATION

PSALM 54:34.—"My meditation of Him shall be sweet."

THERE is no being with whom man stands in such close and important relations as with the invisible God, and yet there is no being with whom he finds it so difficult to have communication. The earth he can see and touch. His fellow-man he can look in the eye and speak to. But "no man hath seen God at any time." Century after century passes by, and the Highest utters no voice that is audible to the outward ear. Thousands and millions of human supplications are sent up to Him who dwells in the heavens, but the heavens are not rent, no deity comes down, and no visible sign is made. The skies are silent. The impenetrable veil between man's body and God's spirit is not withdrawn even for an instant.

As this continues to be the case generation after generation, and century after century, it is natural that those who know of nothing but an external and visible communication between themselves and their Maker should become sceptical concerning his actual existence. Like the pagan idolater, they demand a God who can be seen and handled. Like him, too, they hanker after prodigies and wonders, and desire to be put into palpable communication with the Celestial Powers. "This generation seeketh after a sign." It is not surprising, consequently, that the natural man, finding no response to his passionate and baffled attempts to penetrate the invisible and eternal by the method of the five senses, falls into unbelief, and concludes in his heart that a deity who never shows himself has no real being.

Thus the natural tendency of all men who hold no prayerful and spiritual communication with their Maker is to atheism, so long as they live in a world where he makes no external displays of his person and his presence. A time is indeed coming, when an outward vision of God will break upon them so palpable and evident that they will call upon the rocks and mountains to cover them from it; but until that time they are liable to a scepticism which often renders it difficult, even when they make some efforts to the contrary, to believe that there is a God.

But the child of God—the believing, the spiritual, the prayerful man—is delivered from this atheism. For he knows of an intercourse with his Maker, which, though unattended by signs and wonders, by palpability and tangibility for the bodily senses, is as real and convincing as anything outward or visible can be. He has experienced the forgiveness of sin, and found the disquieting

remorse of his soul displaced by the peace of God in his conscience, and the love of God in his heart. He has known the doubts and fears of a sick bed to give way before God's inward assurance of mercy and acceptance. He has been in a horror of great mental darkness, and into that black void of his soul God has suddenly made a precious promise, or a comforting truth of his word, to shine out clear, distinct, and glittering, like a star shooting up into a midnight sky. He has had love, and peace, and joy, and the whole throng of devout and spiritual affections, flow in currents through his naturally hard and parched soul, at the touch of a Spirit, at the breath of a Being, not of earth or of time. And perhaps more convincing than all, he has offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, for a strength that was not in himself but which he must get or die, for a blessing that his hungry famine-struck soul must obtain or be miserable, and has been heard in that he feared. Thus the Christian's belief in the Divine existence is a vital one. In a higher sense than that of the poet, it is "felt in the blood, and felt along the heart." It is part and particle of his consciousness, waning only as his religious experience wanes, and dying only when that deathless thing shall die.

Yet there are fluctuations in the Christian's faith and sense of God. He needs to school and train himself in this reference. God himself has appointed instrumentalities by which to keep the knowledge of himself pure, clear, and bright in the souls of his children," until the day break and the shadows flee away;" and among them is the habit of devout reflection upon his being and attributes.

The uses of religious meditation upon God, to which we are urged by both the precept and the example of the Psalmist, may be indicated in the three following propositions: 1. Meditation upon God is a lofty and elevating act, because God is infinite in his being and perfections. 2. It is a sanctifying act, because God is holy in his nature and attributes. 3. It is a blessed act of the mind, because God is infinitely blessed, and communicates of his fullness of joy to all who contemplate it.

I. In the first place, meditation upon God is a high and elevating mental act, because of the immensity of the Object. "Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," said the awe-struck Solomon. "God is a most pure spirit, immutable, immense," says the Creed. Reflection upon that which is infinite tends of itself to enlarge and ennoble. Meditation upon that which is immense produces a lofty mood of mind. This is true even of merely material immensity. He who often looks up into the firmament, and views the great orbs that fill it, and the great movements that take place in it,

will come to possess a spirit akin to this material grandeur—for the astronomical spirit is a lofty one—while he who keeps his eyes upon the ground, and looks at nothing but his little plot of earth, and his own little life with its little motions, will be apt to possess a spirit groveling like the things he lives among, and mean like the dirt he treads upon. Says the thoughtful and moral Schiller:<sup>1</sup> "The vision of unlimited distances and immeasurable heights, of the great ocean at his feet and the still greater ocean above him, draws man's spirit away from the narrow sphere of sense, and from the oppressive stricture of physical existence. A grander rule of measurement is held out to him in the simple majesty of Nature, and environed by her great forms he can no longer endure a little and narrow way of thinking. Who knows how many a bright thought and heroic resolve, which the student's chamber or the academic hall never would have originated, has been started out by this lofty struggle of the soul with the great spirit of Nature; who knows whether it is not in part to be ascribed to a less frequent intercourse with the grandeur of the material world, that the mind of man in cities more readily stoops to trifles, and is crippled and weak, while the mind of the dweller beneath the broad sky remains open and free as the firmament under which it lives."<sup>2</sup>

But if this is true of the immensity of Nature, much more is it of the immensity of God. If the sight of the heavens and the stars, of the earth and the vast seas, has a natural tendency to elevate and ennoble the human intellect, much more will the vision granted only to the pure in heart—the vision of the infinite Being who made all these things—exalt the soul above all the created universe. For the immensity of God is the immensity of mind. The infinity of God is an infinity of truth, of purity, of justice, of mercy, of love, and of glory. When the human intellect perceives God, it beholds what the heaven of heavens does not possess and cannot contain. His grandeur and plenitude is far above that of material creation; for he is the source and the free power whence it all came. The magnificence and beauty of the heavens and earth are the work of his fingers; and there is nothing which the bodily sense can apprehend, by day or by night, however sublime and glorious it may be, that is not infinitely inferior to the excelling, transcending glory of God.

It is one of the many injuries which sin does to man, that it degrades him. It excludes him from the uplifting vision of the Creator, and causes him to expend his mental force upon inferior objects—upon money, houses, lands, titles, and "the bubble reputation." Sin imprisons man within narrow limitations, and thus

dwarfs him. And it is one of the consequences of his regeneration that he is enabled to soar again into the realm of the Infinite, and behold unlimited perfection, and thereby regain the dignity he lost by apostasy. For it is a moral and spiritual difference that marks off the hierarchies of heaven from the principalities of hell. Rational beings rise in grade and glorious dignity by virtue of their character. But this character is intimately connected with the clear, unclouded contemplation of God. It is the beatific vision that renders the archangels so lofty. And it is only through a spiritual beholding of God that man can reascend to the point but little lower than the angels, and be crowned again with glory and honor.

II. In the second place, meditation upon God is a sanctifying act, because God is holy and perfect in his nature and attributes. The meditation of which the Psalmist speaks in the text is not that of the schoolman, or the poet, but of the devout, saintly, and adoring mind. That meditation upon God which is "sweeter than honey and the honey-comb" is not speculative, but practical. That which is speculative and scholastic springs from curiosity. That which is practical flows from love. This is the key to this distinction, so frequently employed in reference to the operations of the human mind. All merely speculative thinking is inquisitive, acute, and wholly destitute of affection for the object. But all practical thinking is affectionate, sympathetic, and in harmony with the object. When I meditate upon God because I love him, my reflection is practical. When I think upon God because I desire to explore him, my thinking is speculative. None, therefore, but the devout and affectionate mind truly meditates upon God; and all thought upon that Being which is put forth merely to gratify the curiosity and pride of the human understanding forms no part of the Christian habit and practice which we are recommending. Man in every age has endeavored "by searching to find out God." He has striven almost convulsively to fathom the abyss of the Deity, and discover the deep things of the Creator. But because it was from the love of knowledge rather than from the love of God, his efforts have been both unprofitable and futile. He has not sounded the abyss, neither has his heart grown humble, and gentle, and tender, and pure. His intellect has been baffled, and, what is yet worse, his nature has not been renovated. Nay, more, a weariness and a curse has come into his spirit, because he has put the comprehension of an object in the place of the object itself; because, in his long struggle to understand God, he has not had the first thought of loving and serving him.

There is, indeed, for the created mind, no true knowledge of the Creator but a practical and sanctifying knowledge. God alone

knows the speculative secrets of his own being. The moral and holy perfections of the Godhead are enough, and more than enough, for man to meditate upon. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God," said Moses to the children of Israel, "but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of his law."

True meditation, thus proceeding from filial love and sympathy, brings the soul into intercourse and communion with its object. Devout and holy reflection upon God introduces man into the divine presence, in a true and solid sense of these words. Such a soul shall know God as the natural man does not, and cannot. "Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered, and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." In the hour of spiritual and affectionate musing upon the character and attributes of God—and especially upon their manifestation in the Person and "Work of Christ—there is a positive impression upon the heart, directly from God. In what other mode can we get near to the Invisible One, here upon earth, than by some mental act or process? In what other way than by prayer and meditation can we approach God? We cannot see him with the outward eye. We cannot touch him with the hand. We cannot draw nigh to him with a body of flesh and blood. In no way, here below, can we have intercourse with God, except "in spirit." He is a pure Spirit, and that part of us which has to do with him is the spirit within us. And in this mode of existence, the only ordinary medium of communication between the divine and the human spirit is thought and prayer. God, with all the immensity of his being, and all the infinitude of his perfections, is virtually non-existent for that man who does not meditate and who never prays. For so long as there is no medium of intercourse there is no intercourse. The power of thought and of spiritual supplication is all that God has given us in this life whereby we may approach him, and be impressed by his being and attributes. Eye hath not seen him; the ear cannot hear him. Nothing but the invisible can behold the invisible. Here upon earth, man must meet God in the depths of his soul, in the privacy of his closet, or not at all.

The Christian life is so imperfect here below, that it is unsafe to set it up as a measure of what is possible under the covenant of grace. The possibilities and capacities of the Christian religion are by no means to be estimated by the stunted draughts made upon them by our unfaithfulness and unbelief. Were we as meditative and prayerful as was Enoch, the seventh from Adam, we, like him,

should "walk with God." This was the secret of the wonderful spirituality and unearthliness that led to his translation. Is there upon earth to-day any communion between man and God superior to that between the patriarchal mind and the Eternal? Men tell us that the ancient church was ignorant, and that it cannot be expected that Seth and Enoch and David should be possessed of the vast intelligence of the nineteenth century. But show me the man among the millions of our restless and self-conceited civilization who walks with God as Enoch did, and who meditates upon that glorious Being all the day and in the night watches as David did—show me a man of such mental processes as these, and I will show you one whose shoe latchets, even in intellectual respects, the wisest of our savants is not worthy to stoop down and unloose. No scientific knowledge equals, either in loftiness or in depth, the immortal vision of the saint and seraphim. And were we accustomed to such heavenly contemplation and musing, the "fire would burn" in our hearts as it did in that of the Psalmist, and our souls would "pant" after God. God would be real to our feelings, instead of being a mere abstraction for our understandings. We should be conscious of his presence with a distinctness equal to that with which we feel the morning wind, and should see his glory as clearly as we ever saw the sun at noonday. With as much certainty as we know the sky to be overhead, and underneath the solid ground, should we be certain that "God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him." There would be contact. "I want," said Niebuhr, wearied with seeking and not finding, "I want a God who is heart to my heart, spirit to my spirit, life to my life." Such is God to every soul that loves him, and meditates because it loves.

True meditation, then, being practical, and thereby bringing the subject of it into communion with the object of it, is of necessity sanctifying. For the object is Infinite Holiness and Purity. It is he in whom is centred and gathered and crowded all possible perfections. And can our minds muse upon such a Being and not become purer and better? Can we actually and affectionately commune with the most perfect and high God in the heavens and not become sanctified? The spirit of a man takes its character from the themes of its meditation. He who thinks much upon wealth becomes avaricious; he whose thoughts are upon earthly glory becomes ambitious; and he whose thoughts are upon God becomes godlike.

III. In the third place, meditation upon God is a blessed act of the mind, because God himself is an infinitely blessed being, and communicates of his fullness of joy to all who contemplate it. Mere thinking, in and of itself, is not sufficient to secure happiness. Everything depends upon the quality of the thought, and this again

upon the nature of the object upon which it is expended. There are various kinds and degrees of mental enjoyment, each produced by a particular species of mental reflection; but there is no thinking that gives rest and satisfaction and joy to the soul, but thinking upon the glorious and blessed God. All other thought ultimately baffles and tires us. Heaven comes into the human mind not through poetry, or philosophy, or science, or art—not through any secular knowledge—but through religion. When a man thinks of his wealth, his houses, his friends, or his country, though he derives a sort of pleasure from so doing, yet it is not of such a grave and solid species as to justify its being denominated "bliss." No thought that is expended upon the creature, or upon any of the creaturely relations, can possibly produce that "sober certainty of waking bliss" which constitutes heaven. If it can, why is not man a blessed spirit here on earth? If it can, why is it that man in all his movements and strivings never reaches a final centre, at which he is willing to say to his soul: "This is enough; this is all; here stand and remain forever?" Man is constantly thinking upon the things of earth, and if they have the power to awaken calm and contented thought, and to induce a permanent and perfect joy, why is he so restless and unhappy? And why does he become the more wearied and soured, the more intensely he thinks and toils?

But there is higher and nobler thought than that of trade and politics. Man can meditate upon purely intellectual themes. He can expend intense reflection upon the mysteries and problems of his own mind, and of the Eternal Mind. He can put forth an earnest and graceful effort of his powers within the province of beautiful letters and fine art. But does even such an intellectual, and, so far as it goes, such an elevating meditation as this produce and preserve genuine tranquility and enjoyment? Are poet and philosopher synonymous with saint and angel? Is the learned man necessarily a happy one? Look through the history of literary men, and see their anxious but baffled research, their eager but fruitless inquiry, their acute but empty speculation, their intense but vain study, and you will know that the wise man spoke true when he said, "He that increases knowledge increases sorrow." Hear the sigh of the meditative Wordsworth:

"Me this unchartered freedom tires;  
I feel the weight of chance desires;  
My hopes no more must change their name,  
I long for a repose that ever is the same."

No, all thought which does not ultimately come home to God in practical, filial, and sympathetic communion, is incapable of rendering the soul blest. The intellect may find a kind of pleasure in satisfying its inquisitive and proud desire "to be as gods, knowing good and evil," but the heart experiences no peace or rest, until by a devout and religious meditation it enters into the fullness of God and shares in his eternal joy.

And here again, as in the former instance, our personal experience is so limited and meager that the language of Scripture, and of some saints on earth, seems exaggerated and rhetorical. Says the sober and sincere apostle Paul—a man too much in earnest, and too well acquainted with the subject, to overdraw and overpaint—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." There is a strange unearthly joy, when a pure and spiritual mind is granted a clear view of the divine perfections. It rejoices with a joy unspeakable and full of glorying. All finite beauty, all created glory, is but a shadow in comparison. The holy mind rapt in contemplation says with Augustine: "When I love God, I do not love the beauty of material bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers and perfumes and spices; not manna nor honey. None of these do I love, when I love my God. And yet I love a kind of melody, a kind of fragrance, and a kind of food, when I love my God—the light, the melody, the fragrance, and the food of the inner man: when there shineth into my soul what space cannot contain, and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not. This is it which I love, when I love my God."<sup>3</sup>

We find it difficult, with our sluggish and earthly temper, to believe all this, and to sympathize with it. Yet it is simple naked truth and fact. There is a heaven, whether we reach it or not. There is a beatific vision of God, whether it ever dilate and enrapture our eyes or not. God is infinite blessedness and glory, and no good being can behold him without partaking of it. As he gazes, he is changed into the same image from glory to glory. The more clear and full his vision, the more overwhelming and boundless is the influx of heaven into him. We may know something of this here on earth. The more we meditate upon God and divine things, the happier shall we become in our own minds. There are at this moment, upon this cursed and thistle-bearing earth, some meek and gentle spirits whose life of prayer and holy communion streaks the heavens with

bars of amber, and apparels everything in heavenly light. And the more this divine pleasure enters the soul, the more will it hunger and thirst after it. For this is the summum bonum ; this is the absolute delight. This never satiates. This never wearies. This joy in the vision of God has the power to freshen and invigorate while it runs through the fibers of the heart; and therefore, even amidst the most ecstatic and satisfying visions of heaven, the blessed still cry: " My soul pants after thee, O God, as the hart pants after the water-brook; my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God."

Never will our minds reach a state in which they will really be at rest, and never will they put forth an activity which they will be willing to have eternal, until they acquire the mental habits of the holy angels. In the saints' everlasting rest, there is an unintermittent contemplation and sight of God. Who of us is ready for it? Who of us is certain that he will not turn away, when he finds that this, and this alone, is the heaven of which he has heard so much. Who of us has such a holy frame and such a spiritual sympathy with God, that every deeper descent into that abyss of holiness and purity will reveal new sights of joy, and start out new feelings of wonder and love? Who of us can be happy in heaven? For this open vision of God, this sight of him face to face, this beatific contemplation of his perfections, is the substance of paradise, the jasper foundation of the city of God.

We have thus seen that religious meditation upon God and divine things elevates, sanctifies, and blesses. But though this Christian habit produces such great and good fruits, there is probably no duty that is more neglected. We find it easier to read our Bible, than to ponder upon it; easier to listen to preaching, than to inwardly digest it; easier to respond to the calls of benevolence and engage in external service in the church, than to go into our closets. And is not this the secret of the faint and sickly life in our souls? Is not this the reason why we live at a poor dying rate? Think you that if we often entered into the presence of God and obtained a realizing view of things unseen and eternal, earthly temptation would have such a strong power over us as it does? Think you that if we received every day a distinct and bold impression from the attributes of God, we should be so distant from him in our hearts? Can we not trace our neglect of duty, our lukewarm feelings, and our great worldliness of heart, to our lack of the vision of God?

The success of a Christian mainly depends upon a uniform and habitual communion with his God and Redeemer. No spasmodic resolutions into which he may be exasperated by the goadings of conscience can be a substitute for it. If holy communion and prayer are interrupted, he will surely fall into sin. In this world of continual

temptation and of lethargic consciences, we need to be awakened and awed by the serene splendor of God's holy countenance. But we cannot behold that amidst the vapors and smoke of every-day life. We must go into our closets and "shut the door, and pray to our Father who seeth in secret." Then shall we know how power to resist temptation comes from fellowship with God. Then shall we know what a sabbath that soul enjoys, which, with open eye, looks long and steadily at the Divine perfections. With what a triumphant energy, like that of the archangel trampling on the dragon, does Moses come down from the Mount into the life of conflict and trial. With what a vehement spiritual force does a holy mind resist evil, after it has just seen the contrast between evil and God. Will the eagle that has soared above the earth in the free air of the open firmament of heaven, and has gazed into the sun with an undazzled eye, endure to sink and dwell in the dark cavern of the owl and the bat? Then will the spirit which has seen the glorious light of the divine countenance endure to descend and grovel in the darkness and shame of sin.

It should, therefore, be a diligent and habitual practice with us, to meditate upon God and divine things. Time should be carefully set apart and faithfully used for this sole purpose. It is startling to consider how much of our life passes without any thought of God; without any distinct and filial recognition of his presence and his character. And yet how much of it might be spent in sweet and profitable meditation. The avocations of our daily life do not require the whole of our mental energy and reflection. If there were a disposition; if the current of feeling and affection set in that direction; how often could the farmer commune with God in the midst of his toil, or the merchant in the very din and press of his business. How often could the artisan send his thoughts and his ejaculations upward, and the work of his hands be none the worse for it. "What hinders," says Augustine,<sup>4</sup> "what hinders a servant of God while working with his hands, from meditating in the law of the Lord, and singing unto the name of the Lord most high? As for divine songs, he can easily say them even while working with his hands, and like as rowers with a boat-song, so with godly melody cheer up his very toil." But the disposition is greatly lacking. If there were an all-absorbing affection for God in our hearts, and it were deep joy to see him, would not this "sweet meditation" of the Psalmist be the pleasure of life, and all other thinking the duty—a duty performed from the necessity that attaches to this imperfect mode of existence, rather than from any keen relish for it? If the vision of God were glorious and ravishing to our minds, should we not find them often indulging themselves in the sight, and would not

a return to the things of earth be reluctant? Would not thought upon God steal through and suffuse all our other thinking, as sunset does the evening sky, giving a pure and saintly hue to all our feelings, and pervading our entire experience? So it works in other provinces. The poet Burns was so deeply absorbed in the visions, aspirations, and emotions of poetry, that the avocations of the farmer engrossed but little of his mind, and it has been said of him, that "though his hand was on the plough his heart was with the muse." Were the Christian as much absorbed in the visions, aspirations, and emotions of religion, it would be said of him, too: "His hand is on the plough, but his heart is with his God; his head is in his worldly business, but his heart is with his God."

Finally, let us be urged up to the practice of this duty by a consideration which has most force, it is true, for unrenewed men who know nothing of the Christian experience, but which has much strength for us if we consider our remaining sin and the slender amount of our intercourse with God. We still find it too difficult to delight in God. It is still not so easy and pleasant as it ought to be to walk with God. Notwithstanding our vocation and our expectation, it is still too difficult for us to be happy in heaven. It is in this reference that the subject we have been considering speaks with great emphasis. Let us remember that a foundation for heaven in our own minds is requisite in order to the enjoyment of the heaven that is on high.<sup>5</sup> That rational being who does not practise the meditations and enjoy the experiences of heaven, will not be at home there, and, therefore, will not go there. Every being goes to "his own place." Is it supposable that a soul that never here on earth contemplated the Divine character with pleasure, will see that character in eternity, in peace, and joy? Is it supposable that a human spirit filled with self-seeking and worldliness, and wholly destitute of devout and adoring meditations, will be taken among seraphim and cherubim when taken out of time? Is that world of holy contemplation the proper place for a carnal mind filled through and through with only earthly and selfish thoughts? Can the sensual Dives be happy in the bosom of Abraham? God is not mocked, neither can a man cheat and impose upon his own soul when in eternity. Every one will then be brought to his individuality. He will know then, if not before, what he does really love and what he does really loathe. And if in that other world there be only a pretended and hollow affection for God, with what a sigh and long-drawn moan will the wretched being fling down the harp with which he vainly tries to sing the heavenly song. For whatsoever a man thinks of with most relish here in time, he shall think of with most relish in eternity. He who loves to think of wealth, and fame, and sensual

pleasure, and loathes to think of God, and Christ, and heavenly objects, shall think of wealth, and fame, and sensual pleasure in eternity, where all such thinking is "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." But he who, in any degree, loves to think of God and Christ, and abhors to think of sin in all its forms, shall think of God and Christ in eternity—where all such thought is music, and peace, and rest.

The destination of every man in another world may be inferred and known from the general tenor of his thoughts in this. He who does not love to think upon a particular class of subjects here will not love to think upon them there. The mere passage from time to eternity can no more alter a man's likes or dislikes in this respect than the passage of the Atlantic can alter them. And that rational spirit, be it human, angelic, or arch-angelic, which in eternity cannot take positive delight in contemplating God, but recoils from all such contemplation, is miserable and lost, though it tread the golden streets and hear the rippling murmurs of the river of the water of life. But if our meditation upon God is sweet here, it will be sweeter in eternity. And then our blessedness will be certain and secure; for no spirit, human, angelic, or arch-angelic, can by any possibility be made unblest in any part of God's vast dominions, if it really finds joy in the contemplation of the ever-present God.

## SERMON II. CHRISTIAN MODERATION

PROVERBS 16:32.—"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

THE book of Proverbs is the best of all manuals for the formation of a well-balanced mind. The object of Solomon in composing it seems to have been to furnish to the church a summary of rules and maxims by which the Christian character, having been originated by regeneration, should then be educated and made symmetrical. We do not, therefore, go to this portion of Scripture so much for ' full and definite statements of the distinguishing doctrines of revealed religion, as for those wise and prudential canons whereby we may reform extravagance, prune down luxuriance, and combine the whole variety of traits and qualities into a harmonious and beautiful unity. We do not find in this part of the Bible careful and minute specifications of the doctrine of the trinity, of the apostasy of mankind, of the incarnation of the Son of God, of vicarious atonement, regeneration and justification. They are hinted at, it is true—as when the Eternal Wisdom is spoken of as being with the Lord "in the beginning of his way, before his works of old; as one brought up with him, daily his delight, and rejoicing always before him." (Prov. viii. 22, 30.) Here we have the same doctrine, germinally, with that of the Apostle John, when he affirms that the Eternal Word, or Reason, "in the beginning was with God, and was God." And what are such assertions, as that "there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccl. vii. 20), and such questions as, "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin"? (Prov. xx. 9), but an indirect statement of the doctrine of human depravity? Still it is not the main purpose of Solomon, in those two books of the inspired canon which go under the name of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, to particularly enunciate the evangelical system; but rather to set forth those principles of ethics, and religious prudence, which must always follow in the train of evangelical religion. It is reserved for other portions of the Bible—for the Gospels and the Epistles—to make the fundamental statements, and lay the foundations of Christian character; while it remains for the wise Preacher to follow up with those teachings which serve to develop and beautify it. The book of revelation is, in this way, like the book of nature. The scientific naturalist does not claim that everything in nature is upon a dead level in respect to intrinsic worth and importance—that a bit of charcoal is just as valuable as a

bit of diamond; that a lily is just as high up the scale of creation as a man. But he does claim that one is as much the work of creative power as the other, and in its own sphere and place is as indispensable to the great sum total of creation as is the other. And so, too, the scientific theologian does not claim that everything in the Bible is upon a dead level in respect to intrinsic value—that the book of Esther is as important for purposes of regeneration and conversion as is the Epistle to the Romans—but he does claim that both alike are the product of Divine inspiration; that both alike are a portion of that Word of God, that sum-total of revealed truth upon which, as a whole, the kingdom of God in the earth is to be founded and built up. Had the book of Esther been lost out of the canon, it would not have been so great a detriment to the church as the loss of the Gospel of John, or of the Epistle to the Romans. If the missionary were allowed to carry only a single fragment of Scripture into a heathen population, and were compelled to make his choice between the book of Proverbs or the Gospel of St. Matthew, he would undoubtedly select the latter. Not, however, because one is less trustworthy than the other; but because one contains more of the doctrinal material which the missionary employs in laying the foundation of the church; because it gives more information concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the way of salvation than does the other. The book of Proverbs, as we have remarked, was composed not so much for the purpose of originating a holy character, as of shaping and polishing it; and for this purpose it is indispensable, and for this purpose it was inspired. And hence in missionary fields, as well as in the church at large, the wise maxims and well-grounded ethics of Solomon will always follow up the evangelical truths and doctrines of the Apostle John, and the Apostle Paul.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." In this concise sententious "proverb," the wise man describes and recommends a certain kind of temper which should be possessed and cherished by the people of God. We purpose, in the first place, briefly to describe this temper; in the second place, to mention some of the obstacles that oppose its formation; and in the third place, to point out the true source and root of it.

The temper that is recommended in the text, to say it in a word, is Christian moderation. St. Paul urges the same thing with Solomon, when he writes to the Philippians: "Let your moderation be known unto all men;" when he writes to the Thessalonians: "Let us watch and be sober;" and when he writes to Titus, that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

I. In defining, in the first place, the nature of this temper and disposition, it is evident that a man who is "slow to anger," and who "ruleth his spirit," is characterized by sobriety and equanimity. He is never driven to extremes, in any direction. For anger is one of the most vehement of emotions, and he who can control it can control anything, can "take a city." Hence this particular passion is selected as the specimen. He who reins in his own impulsive wrath with such a strong and firm rein that it never gets the mastery over him, will find it no difficult task to rule and regulate the whole brood of passions which have their nest in corrupt human nature. Such a man is even-tempered, in the deepest sense. Such a man stands in just and proper relations to both worlds. He lives with contentment here upon earth, and at the same time lays up treasure in heaven. He does not drown himself in worldly lusts, like a voluptuary, and neither does he kill out all human sympathies, like an ascetic. He uses this world as not abusing it in either direction. He does not abuse the good things of this life, by an immoderate indulgence in them, or an immoderate desire and toil after them; and he does not abuse the legitimate enjoyments of this existence, by a fanatical contempt and rejection of them altogether. He is not so absorbed in the things of time and sense, as to lose sight of eternal realities; neither is he so monkishly indifferent to the interests and objects of this life, as to be either a drone or a malcontent. He responds to all the reasonable and proper demands of domestic, social, and civil existence, while yet he never becomes so extreme in his attachment, and so enslaved to them, that it costs him murmurings and bitter pangs to be called away from these circles into the immediate presence of God.

This is indeed a wonderful temper to be attained by so ill-governed, so passionate, impulsive, and unbalanced a creature as man. It is no wonder that such a well-poised and symmetrical character as this floated as an unattainable ideal before the minds of the better pagan philosophers. This is the famous "temperance" which meets the scholar so continually in the writings of Plato and Aristotle—that golden mean between the extremes of passion and apathy which the philosopher strives to reach. "Quietly reflecting"—says Plato—"on the madness and ungovernable passions of the multitude, and attending to his own affairs, like a man sheltered under a wall in a storm of dust and foam borne along on the wind, by which he sees all about him overwhelmed in disorder, such an one is content to pass his life free from violence and passion, and to effect his exit hence with good hopes, cheerful and serene."<sup>1</sup> This is

his description of the moderation, the equanimity, the temperance of the philosophic mind. But in other places this thoughtful pagan confesses that this golden mean is never reached here upon earth, either by the philosopher or the common man, He compares the soul to a pair of horses—one of them erect, finely formed, with high neck, aquiline nose, white-colored, black-eyed, a lover of honor and temperance and true glory, driven without the whip, by word of command and voice only; the other crooked, thick set, clumsily put together, with strong neck, short throat, flat face, black color, gray-eyed, addicted to insolence and swaggering, scarcely obedient to whip and spur together.<sup>2</sup> These two opposing creatures, according to him, represent the present condition of the human soul. There are aspirations that would lead it upward, but there are appetites that drag it downward. The white horse would pursue the path of honor and excellence; but the black horse draws away from the path, and plunges madly downward. And the black horse is the strongest. The appetite is too mighty for the resolution. There is an infinite aspiration, and an infinitesimal performance. Such is the mournful confession of the greatest thinker outside of the pale of revelation; and if a Plato could discover and teach to future generations the corruption and helplessness of human nature, what shall we say of those teachers under the full light of revelation, who would have us believe that there is no corruption in man but such as can be eradicated by man himself, and who would dispense with the evangelical means and methods of healing and salvation.

II. And this brings us to consider, in the second place, some of the obstacles that oppose the formation of such a Christian sobriety and moderation. They spring from two general sources—the sense, and the mind. They are partly physical, and partly intellectual obstacles.

1. In the first place, this Christian sobriety and moderation is opposed by the appetites and passions of the body. St. Paul, speaking of man before regeneration, says, "When we were in the flesh, the motions [passions] of sins which were by the law did work in our members, to bring forth fruit unto death." It is one of the effects of apostasy, that human nature is corrupted upon the physical side of it, as well as upon the mental and moral side. "Original sin," as the Westminster creed affirms, "is the corruption of the whole nature." The bodily appetites are very different now from what they would have been, had man remained in his original and holy condition. When Adam came from the hand of the Creator, his physical nature was pure and perfect. All of his appetites and sensibilities were in just proportion, and were exactly balanced and harmonized. The original and holy Adam was no glutton, and no