



THE VANITY OF THOUGHTS

BEING AN INSTANCE OF THE ABOUNDING
SINFULNESS IN ONE FACULTY OF THE SOUL

Thomas Goodwin



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Introduction

How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?—JER. 4:14.

IN these words the compares the heart unto some house of common resort, made, as it were, with many and large rooms to entertain and lodge multitudes of guests in; into which, before conversion, all the vain, light, wanton, profane, dissolute thoughts that post up and down the world, as your thoughts do, and run riot all the day, have free, open access, the heart keeps open house to them, gives them willing, cheerful welcome and entertainment; accompanies them, travels over all the world for the daintiest pleasures to feed them with; lodgeth, harbours them; and there they, like unruly gallants and roysters, lodge, and revel it day and night, and defile those rooms they lodge in with their loathsome

filth and vomits. 'How long,' says the Lord, 'shall they lodge therein,' whilst I, with my Spirit, my Son, and train of graces, 'stand at the door and knock,' Rev. 3:20, and cannot find admittance? Of all which filthiness, &c., the heart, this house, must be washed: 'Wash thy heart from wickedness.' Washed, not swept only of grosser evils, as, Matt. 12:43, the house the unclean spirit re-enters into is said to be swept of evils that lay loose and uppermost, but washed and cleansed of those defilements which stick more close, and are incorporated and wrought into the spirit. And those vain and unruly guests must be turned out of doors without any warning; they have stayed there long enough, too long: 'how long?' And 'the time past may suffice,' as the Apostle speaks; they must lodge there no more. The house, the soul, is not in conversion to be pulled down, but only these guests turned out; and though kept out they cannot be, they will still enter whilst we are in these houses of clay, yet lodge they must not. If thoughts of anger and revenge come in the morning or daytime, they must be turned out ere night: 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath,' Eph. 4:26; for so you may come to lodge yet a worsen guest in your heart with them. 'Give not place to the devil,' for it follows, who will 'bring seven worse with him.' If unclean thoughts offer to come to bed to thee when thou liest down, let them not lodge with thee. To conclude, it is not what thoughts are in your hearts, and pass through them, as what lodging they have, that doth difference your repentance. Many good thoughts and motions may pass as strangers through a bad man's heart; and so likewise multitudes of vain thoughts may make a thoroughfare of a believer's heart, and disturb him in good duties, by knockings and interruptions, and breakings in upon the heart of a good man; but still they lodge not there—are not fostered, harboured.

My scope in our ordinary course is, to discover the wickedness and vanity of the heart by nature. In the heart, we are yet but in the upper parts of it, the understanding, and the defilements thereof, which are to be washed out of it; and the next defilement which in my broken order I mean to handle is that which is here specified, **THE VANITY OF YOUR THOUGHTS**. For the discovery's sake of which only, I chose this text as my ground; that is it, therefore, which I chiefly insist upon; a subject which, I confess, would prove of all else the vastest. To make an exact particular discovery of the vanities in our thoughts, to travel over the

whole creation, and to take a survey and give an account of all that vanity abounds in all the creatures, was, as you know, the task of the wisest of men, Solomon; the flower of his studies and labours. But the vanity of our thoughts are as multiplied much in us; this little world affords more varieties of vanities than the great. Our thoughts made the 'creatures subject to vanity,' Rom. 8:20; therefore themselves are subject to vanity much more. In handling of them I will shew you—1. What is meant by thoughts. 2. What by vanity. 3. That our thoughts are vain. 4. Wherein that vanity doth consist, both in the general and some particulars.

What is Meant by Thoughts?

1. First, what is meant by thoughts, especially as they are the intended subject of this discourse, which in so vast an argument I must necessarily set limits unto.

(1.) By thoughts the Scriptures do comprehend all the internal acts of the mind of man, of what faculty soever; all those reasonings, consultations, purposes, resolutions, intents, ends, desires, and cares of the mind of man, as opposed to our external words and actions. So, Isa. 66:18, all acts are divided into those two, 'I know their works and their thoughts.' What is transacted within the mind is called the thoughts; what thereof do manifest themselves and break out in actions are called works. And so, Gen. 6:5, 'Every imagination of the thoughts'—*omne figmentum*, all the creatures the mind frames within itself, purposes, desires, &c., (as it is noted in the margin)—'are evil;' where by thoughts are understood all that 'comes within the mind,' (as, Ezek. 11:5, the phrase is,) and so indeed we vulgarly use it and understand it. So to 'remember' a man is to 'think' of him, Gen. 40:14; to have purposed a thing, we say, I thought to do it; to take care about a business, is to 'take thought,' 1 Sam. 9:5. And the reason why all may thus be called the thoughts, is because indeed all affections, desires, purposes, are stirred up by thoughts—bred, fomented, and nourished by them. No one thought passeth, but it stirreth some affection of fear, joy, care, grief, &c. No, although they are thus largely taken here, yet I intend not to handle the vanity of them in so large a sense at present.

I must confine myself, as strictly as may be, to the vanity of that which is more properly called the thinking, meditating, considering power of man, which is in his understanding or spirit, that being the subject I have in hand; thoughts not being in this sense opposed only to your works, but unto purposes and intents. So, Heb. 4:12, as the soul and spirit, so thoughts and intents seem to be opposed. And, Job 20:2, 3, 'thoughts' are appropriated to the 'spirit of understanding.' And again, yet more strictly, for in the understanding I mean not to speak of, generally, all thoughts therein, neither, as not of the reasonings or deliberations in our actions, but those musings only in the speculative part.

And so I can no otherwise express them to you than thus: Those same first more simple conceits, apprehensions that arise, those fancies, meditations, which the understanding, by the help of fancy, frames within itself of things; those whereon your minds ponder and pore, and muse upon things; these I mean by thoughts. I mean those talkings of our minds with the things we know, as the Scripture calls it, Prov. 6:22; those same par leys, interviews, chattings, the mind hath with the things let into it, with the things we fear, with the things we love. For all these things our minds make their companions, and our thoughts hold them discourse, and have a thousand conceits about them; this I mean by thoughts. For besides that reasoning power, deliberating power, whereby we ask ourselves continually, What shall we do? and whereby we reason and discuss things, which is a more inward closet, the cabinet and privy council of the heart, there is a more outward lodging, that presence-chamber, which entertains all comers, which is the thinking, meditating, musing power in man, which suggesteth matter for deliberations, and consultations, and reasonings, which holds the objects till we view them, which entertaineth all that come to speak with any of our affections.

(2.) I add, 'which the mind frames within itself;' so the Scripture expresseth their original to us, and their manner of rising, Prov. 6:14, 'Frowardness is in his heart,'—fabricatur,—'he forgeth mischief,' as a smith doth iron, hammers it out. And the thoughts are the materials of this frowardness in us; upon all the things which are presented to us, the mind begets some thoughts, imaginations on them; and as lusts, so thoughts ore conceived, James 1. Isa. 59:4, 'They conceive mischief, and

bring forth iniquity, and hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave spiders' webs.' And, ver. 7, he instanceth in 'thoughts of iniquity,' because our thoughts are spun out of our own hearts, are eggs of our own laying, though the things presented to us be from without.

And this I add to sever them from such thoughts as are injected and cast in only from without, which are children of another's begetting, and often laid out of doors: such as ore blasphemous thoughts cast in by Satan, wherein if the soul be merely passive, (as the word 'buffeting' implies, 2 Cor. 12:7,) they are none of your thoughts, but his; wherein a man is but as one in a room with another, where he hears another swear and curse, but cannot get out from him; such thoughts, if they be only 'from without,' defile not a man. For 'nothing defiles a man but what comes from within,' Matt. 15:18, 19, or which the heart hath begotten upon it by the devil,—as thoughts of uncleanness, &c.,—wherein, though he be the father, yet the heart is the mother and womb, and therefore accordingly affect the heart, as natural children do. And by that we may distinguish them from the other, namely, when we have a soft heart, an inward love unto them, so that our hearts do kiss the child, then they are our thoughts; or else when the heart broods upon those eggs, then they are our thoughts, though they come from without.

Though this is to be added, that even those thoughts wherein the soul is passive, and which Satan casts in, which we do nowadays own, wherein he ravisheth the heart, rather than begets them on us, (if there be not any consent to them in us, then it is but a rape, as in law it is,) I yield those thoughts are punishments often of neglect of our thoughts, and of our suffering them to wander; as Dinah, because she went cunningly out, to 'view the daughters of the land,' was taken and ravished; though against her will, yet it was a punishment of her curiosity. Or else they are the punishment of the neglect of good motions of the Spirit; which resisting, we thereby grieve him, and so he deals with us as we with our children, suffers us to be scared with bugbears, and to be grieved by Satan, that we may learn what it is to neglect him and harbour vanity. Lastly, I add, 'which the mind, in and by itself, or by the help of fancy, thus begets and entertains,' because there are no thoughts or likenesses of things at any time in our fancies, but at the same time they are in the understanding

also reflected unto it. As when two looking-glasses are placed opposite and nigh each to other, look, what species appears in the one do also in the other.

What is Vanity?

2. Secondly, let us see what vanity is. Take it in all the acceptations of it, it is true of our thoughts that they are vain.

(1.) It is taken for unprofitableness. So, Eccles. 1:2, 3, 'All is vain,' because there is 'no profit in them under the sun.' Such are our thoughts by nature; the wisest of them will not stand as in any stead in time of need, in time of temptation, distress of conscience, day of death or judgment: 1 Cor. 2:6, 'All the wisdom of the wise comes to nought;' Prov. 10:20, 'The heart of the wicked is little worth,' not a penny for them all. Whereas the thoughts of a godly man are his treasure: 'Out of the good treasure of his heart he brings them forth.' He mints them, and they are laid up as his riches. Ps. 139:17, 'How precious are they!' He there speaks of our thoughts of God, as the object of them; 'Thy thoughts'—that is, of thee—'are precious.'

(2.) Vanity is taken for lightness. 'Lighter than vanity' is a phrase used, Ps. 62:9; and whom is it spoken of? Of men; and if anything in them be lighter than other, it is their thoughts, which swim in the uppermost parts, float at the top, are as the scum of the heart. When all the best, and wisest, and deepest, and solidest thoughts in Belshazzar, a prince, were weighed, they were found too light, Dan. 5:27.

(3.) Vanity is put for folly. So, Prov. 12:11, 'vain men' is made all one with men 'void of understanding.' Such are our thoughts. Among other evils which are said to 'come out of the heart,' Mark 7:22, ἀφροσύνη is reckoned as one, foolishness; that is, thoughts that are such as madmen have, and fools, nothing to the purpose, of which there can be made no use, which a man knows not whence they should come, nor whither they would, without dependence.

(4.) It is put for inconstancy and frailty; therefore vanity and a shadow are made synonymous, Ps. 144:4. Such are our thoughts, flitting and perishing, as bubbles: Ps. 146:4, 'All their thoughts perish.'

(5.) Lastly, they are vain; that is, indeed, wicked and sinful. Vanity in the text here is yoked with wickedness; and vain men and sons of Belial are all one, 2 Chron. 13:7. And such are our thoughts by nature: Prov. 24:9, 'The thought of foolishness is sin.' And therefore a man is to be humbled for a proud thought, Prov. 30:32. For so 'laying hand on the mouth' is taken, as Job 40:4, for being vile in a man's own eyes.

Thoughts are Sinful

3. And because this is the sense I chiefly must insist on in handling the vanity of the thoughts, and also men usually think that thoughts are free, I will therefore prove this to you, which is the only doctrine raised, that thoughts are sins.

(1.) The law judgeth them, Heb. 4:12; rebukes a man for them, 1 Cor. 14:25; and therefore they are transgressions of the law. And so also did Christ rebuke the Pharisees for their 'ill thoughts,' Matt. 9:4; which argues the excellency of the law, that reacheth thoughts.

(2.) Because they are capable of pardon, and must be pardoned, or we cannot be saved, Acts 8:22; which argues the multitudes of God's compassions, seeing thoughts are so infinite.

(3.) They are to be repented of; yea, repentance is expressed as to begin at them: so, Isa. 55:7, 'Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts.' And a man is never truly and thoroughly wrought on, as 2 Cor. 10:4, 5, till 'every thought be brought into obedience;' which argues that they are naturally rebellious, and contrary to grace. And this also argueth the power of grace, which is able to rule and to subdue so great an army as our thoughts are, and command them all, as one day it will do, when we are perfectly holy.

(4.) They defile the man; which nothing defiles but sin: Matt. 15:18, 19, 'Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts; these defile the man.'

(5.) They are an abomination to the Lord, who hates nothing but sin, and whose 'pure eyes can endure to behold no iniquity,' Hab. 1:13. As good meditations are acceptable, Ps. 19:14, so, by the rule of contrary, bad are abominable.

(6.) They hinder all good we should do, and spoil our best performances. Vain thoughts draw the heart away in them, that when a man should draw nigh to God, his heart, by reason of his thoughts, is 'far off from him,' Isa. 29:13. A man's heart goes after his covetousness, when he should hear, as the prophet speaks, because his thoughts thus run. Now, nothing else but sin could separate; and what doth estrange us from God is sin, and enmity to him.

(7.) Our thoughts are the first motioners of all the evil in us. For they make the motion, and also bring the heart and object together, are panders to our lusts, hold up the object till the heart hath played the adulterer with, it, and committed folly: so in speculative uncleanness, and in other lusts, they hold up the images of those gods they create, which the heart falls down and worships; they present credit, riches, beauty, tilt the heart hath worshipped them, and this when the things themselves are absent.

In What Does this Vanity Consist?

4. To come now to those particulars wherein this vanity of the thinking, meditating power of the mind consists:—

First, I will discover it in regard of thinking what is good—how unable and loath, &c., it is to good thoughts; and, secondly, in regard of the readiness of it to think of evil and vain things.

For the first, it is seen, (1.) in a want of ability ordinarily and naturally to

raise and extract holy and useful considerations and thoughts from all ordinary occurrences and occasions; which the mind, so far as it is sanctified, is apt unto, A heart sanctified, and in whose affections true grace is enkindled, out of all God's dealings with him, out of the things he sees and hears, out of all the objects are put into the thoughts, he distilleth holy, and sweet, and useful meditations; and it naturally doth it, and ordinarily doth it, so far as it is sanctified. So our Saviour Christ, all speeches of others which he heard, all accidents and occurrences, did still raise and occasion in him heavenly meditations, as we may see throughout the whole Gospels. When he came by a well, he speaks of the 'water of life,' John 4, &c. Many instances might be given. He in his thoughts translated the book of the creatures into the book of grace, and so did Adam's heart in innocency. His philosophy might be truly termed divinity, because he saw God in all; all raised up his heart to thankfulness and praise. So now, in like manner, our minds, be far as they are sanctified, will do. As the philosopher's stone turns all metals into gold, as the bee sucks honey out of every flower, and a good stomach sucks out some sweet and wholesome nourishment out of what it takes unto itself; so doth a holy heart, so far as sanctified, convert and digest all into spiritual useful thoughts. This you may see, Ps. 107:43. That psalm gives many instances of God's providence, and 'wonderful works which he doth for the sons of men;' as deliverances by sea, where men see his wonders; deliverance to captives, &c.: and still the foot of the song is, 'O that men would therefore praise the Lord for the wonderful works he doth for the sons of men.' Now, after all these instances, he concludes, that though others pass over such occurrences with ordinary slight thoughts, yet says he, 'The righteous shall see it, and rejoice,' that is, extract comfortable thoughts out of all, which shall be matter of joy; and 'whoso is wise will observe these things,' that is, makes holy observations out of all these, and out of a principle of wisdom he understands God's goodness in all, and so his heart is raised to thoughts of praise, and thankfulness, and obedience. Now, compare with this the 92d Psalm, made for the Sabbath, when, in imitation of God, who that day viewed his works, we are, on our Lord's day, still to raise holy praiseful thoughts out of them to his glory, which he that penned that psalm then did, ver. 1, 2, and ver. 5, 6, 'How great are thy works!' &c. 'A brutish man knows not, nor will a fool understand this;' that is, he being a beast, and having no sanctified

principle of wisdom in him, looks no further than a beast into all the works of God and occurrences of things; looks on all blessings as things provided for man's delight by God; but he extracts seldom holy, spiritual, and useful thoughts out of all, he wants the art of doing it.

If injuries be offered us by others, what do our thoughts distil out of those wrongs, but thoughts of revenge? We meditate how to requite it again. But see how naturally David's mind distils other thoughts of Shimei's cursing, 2 Sam. 16:11, 'God hath bidden him,' and it may prove a good sign of God's favour, 'God may requite good for it.' When we see judgments befall others, severe thoughts of censure our minds are apt to raise against our brother, as Job's friends did. But a godly man, whose mind is much sanctified, raiseth other thoughts out of it, Prov. 21:29, 'wisely considers,' &c.

So when outward mercies befall us, the next thoughts we are apt to have is to project ease by our wealth, 'Thou hast goods for many years;' and when judgments befall us, we are apt to be filled with thoughts of complaint, and fears, and cares how to wind out again. But what were the first thoughts Job had upon the news of the loss of all? God hath given, and the Lord hath taken, blessed be the Lord for all.

Such thoughts as these, which all opportunities hint unto, a good heart is apprehensive of, and doth naturally raise for its own use. So far barren as our thoughts are, so far vain.

(2.) The vanity and sinfulness of the mind appears in a loathness to entertain holy thoughts, to begin to set itself to think of God, and the things belonging unto our peace; even as loath they are to this as schoolboys are to their books, or to busy their minds about their lessons, their heads being full of play; so loath are our minds to enter into serious considerations, into sad, solemn thoughts of God or death, &c. Men are as loath to think of death as thieves of the execution; or to think of God, as they are of their judge. So to go over their own actions, in a review of them, and read the blurred writing of their hearts, and to 'commune with them,' at night in the end of the day, (as David did, Ps. 77:6,) men are as loath to do this as schoolboys are to parse their lessons, and the false Latins they have made. Job 21:14, Depart from us,' say they in Job unto

God; from their thoughts they meant it, for it follows, 'we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.' They would not think of him, or know him, by their good wills. And therefore our minds, like a bad stomach, are nauseated with the very scent of good things, and soon cast them up again: Rom. 1:28, 'They like not to retain the knowledge of God.' Let us go and try to wind up our souls, at any time, to holy meditations, to think of what we have heard, or what we have done, or what is our duty to do, and we shall find our minds, like the pegs of an instrument, slip between our fingers, as we are a-winding them up, and to fall down suddenly again, ere we are aware of it; yea, you shall find, will labour to shun what may occasion such thoughts, even as men go out of the way when they see they must meet with one they are loath to speak withal; yea, men dare not be alone, for fear such thoughts should return upon them. The best shall find a gladness for an excuse by other occasions to knock off their thoughts from what is good; whereas in thinking of vain earthly things, we think the time passeth too fast, clocks strike too soon, hours pass away ere we are aware of it.

(3.) The vanity and sinfulness of the mind appears in the godly, that though they entertain good thoughts, yet the mind is not, will not, be long intent on them. Some things there are which we are and can be intent upon, and accordingly dwell long upon them; and therefore, in Job 17:11, the thoughts are called the 'possessions of the heart,'—so it is in the original, and noted in the margin. Such thoughts as are pleasing, the heart dwells on them; yea, so intent are we often, that they hinder our sleep: as it is said of wicked men, 'They cannot sleep for multitude of thoughts,' Eccles. 5:12; so, 'to devise froward things,' Solomon says, Prov. 16:30, that 'a man shuts his eyes,' that is, is exceeding attentive, poreth upon his plots; for so a man doth use to do, to shut his eyes when he would be intent, and therefore it is so expressed. But now let the mind be occupied and busied about good things, and things belonging to our peace, how unsteady is it! Which things should yet draw out the intention of the mind; for the more excellent the object is, the stronger our intention should be. God is the most glorious object our minds can fasten on, the most alluring: the thoughts of whom therefore should swallow up all other, as not worthy to be seen the same day with him. But I appeal to all your experiences, if your thoughts of him be not most unsteady, and

are, that I may so compare it, as when we look upon a star through an optic glass, held with a palsyshaking hand. It is long ere we can bring our minds to have ken of him, to place our eyes upon him; and when we have, how do our hands shake, and be lose sight ever and anon! So whilst we are in never so serious talk with him, when all things else should stand without, and not dare to offer entrance till we have done with him, yet how many chinks are there in the heart at which other, thoughts come in! and our minds leave God, and follow them, and 'go after our covetousness,' our credit, &c., as the prophet's phrase is, Ezek. 33:31. So when we are hearing the word, how do our minds ever and anon run out of the church, and come in again, and so do not hear half what is said! So when we are at our callings, which God bids us to be conversant about with all our might, Eccles. 9:10; yet our minds, like idle truants, or negligent servants, though sent about never so serious a business, yet go out of the way to see any sport, run after the hares that cross the way, follow after butterflies that buzz about us.

And so when we come to pray, Christ bids 'watch to prayer,' Mark 13:33; that is, as if we were at every door to place a guard, that none come in and disturb and knock us off. But how oft doth the heart nod, and fall asleep, and run into another world, as men in dreams do! Yea, so natural are distractions to us, when we are busied about holy duties, that as excrements come from men, when very weak and sick, ere they are aware of it, so do worldly thoughts from us, and we are carried out of that stream of good our mind was running in, into some by-creek, ere we are aware of it.

(4.) The vanity of the mind appears, in regard of good things, that if he doth think of them, yet it doth it unseasonably. It is with your thoughts as with your speeches, their goodness lies in their placing and order, Prov. 25:11: if 'fitly spoken,' they are 'as apples of gold in pictures of silver.' And as a man is to bring forth actions, so thoughts, 'in due season;' as those fruits, so those buds should come out in season, Ps. 1:3. Now the vanity of the mind appears in thinking of some good things, sometimes unseasonably. When you are praying, you should not only have no worldly thoughts come in, but no other than praying thoughts. But then haply some notions of, or for a sermon will come readily in. So in hearing,

a man shall often have good thoughts that are heterogeneal to the thing in hand. So when a man is falling down to prayer, look, what thing a man had forgotten when it should have been thought of, will then come in, or what will affect a man much comes in to divert him. This misplacing of thoughts, suppose they be good, is yet from a vanity of the mind; did those thoughts come at another time, they should be welcome. We find our minds ready to spend thoughts about anything rather than what God at present calls unto. When we go to a sermon, we find we could then spend our thoughts more willingly about reading, or haply searching our hearts; unto which at another time, when called to it, we should be most unwilling to. We could be content to run wild over the fields of meditations and miscellaneous thoughts, though about good, rather than to be tied to that task, and kept in one set path.

In Adam and Christ no thought was misplaced, but though they were as many as the stars, yet they marched in their courses, and kept their ranks. But ours as meteors dance up and down in us. And this disorder is a vanity and sin, be the thought materially never so good. Not every one that hath the best part must therefore first step up the stage to act, but take his right cue. In printing, let the letters be never so fair, yet if not placed in their order, and rightly composed, they mar the sense. Soldiers upon no terms should break their ranks; so nor should our thoughts. Prov. 16:3, there is a promise to a righteous man, that, as some read it, 'his thoughts shall be ordered.'

And so much for the first part, the privative sinfulness in our thoughts, in respect of what is good.

Now, secondly, I proceed to discover that positive vanity which appeareth in our thoughts in regard of what is evil. And here it is not to be expected, nor indeed can it be performed by any man, to reckon up the several particularities of all those vain thoughts which run through man's heart. I will insist only on some more general discoveries, to which particulars may be reduced for a taste of the rest.

(1.) The vanity of them discovers itself in that which Christ calls, Mark 7:22, ἀφροσύνη, foolishness,—that is, such thoughts as madmen have, and fools,—which foolishness is seen both in that unsettled wantonness

and unstayedness of the mind in thinking, that, like quicksilver, it cannot fix, but as Solomon says, Prov. 17:24, 'A fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth,' are garish, and run up and down from one end of the earth to the other, shooting and streaming, as those meteors you see sometimes in the air. And though indeed the mind of man is nimble and able thus to run from one end of the earth to another, which is its strength and excellence, yet God would not have this strength, and nimbleness, and mettle spirit in curvetting and trembling, as I may call it, but in steady directing all our thoughts straight on to his glory, our own salvation, and the good of others; he gave it this nimbleness to turn away from evil, and the first appearance of it. As we are to walk in God's ways he calls us to, so every thought, as well as every action, is a step, and therefore ought to be steady; 'Make straight steps to your feet,' says the Apostle, Heb. 12:13, turning not to the right hand nor to the left, until we come to the journey's end of that business we are to think of. But our thoughts at best are as wanton spaniels, who, though indeed they go with and accompany their master, and come to their journey's end with him in the end, yet do run after every bird, and wildly pursue every flock of sheep they see. This unsteadiness ariseth from the like curse on the mind of man as was on Cain, that it being 'driven from the presence of the Lord,' it proves a vagabond, and so 'men's eyes are in the ends of the earth.'

This foolishness, or ἀφροσύνη, is also seen in that independence in our thoughts; they hanging oft together as ropes of sand. This we see more evidently in dreams. And not only then, but when awake also, and that when we would set ourselves to be most serious, how do our thoughts jingle and ring backward! And as wanton boys, when they take pens in their hands, scribble broken words that have no dependence, thus do our thoughts; and if you would but look over the copies thereof which you write continually, you would find as much nonsense in your thoughts as you find in madmen's speeches. This madness and distemper is in the mind since the fall, (though it appears not in our words, because we are wiser,) that if notes were taken of our thoughts, we should find thoughts so vagrant, that we know not how they come in, nor whence they come, nor whither they would. But as God doth all things in weight, number, and measure, so doth his image in us, so far as it is renewed. And by reason of these two, the folly, unsettledness, and independence of our

thoughts, we bring our thoughts often to no issue, to no perfection, but wilder away our time in thinking, as you use to say, of nothing. And as Seneca says of men's lives, as of ships that are tossed up and down at sea, it may be said they have been tossed much but sailed nothing; the like in this respect may be said of the thoughts. Or as when men make imperfect dashes, and write nonsense, they are said to scribble, they do not write; so, in these follies and independencies, we wilder and lose ourselves, we do not think. But—

(2.) On the contrary, if any strong lust or violent passion be up, then our thoughts are too fixed and intent, and run in so far into such sinful objects, that they cannot be pulled out again, or any way diverted or taken off: which is another vanity. For our thoughts and our understanding part was ordained to moderate, allay, and cool, and take off our passions, when they are a-playing over, to rule and govern them. But now our thoughts are themselves subjected to our affections, and, like fuel put under them, do but make them boil the more. And although our thoughts do first stir up our fears, joys, desires, &c., yet these being stirred up once, chain, and fix, and hold our thoughts to those objects, so as we cannot loosen them again. Therefore says Christ to his disciples, 'Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?' For perturbations in the affections cause thoughts like fumes and vapours to ascend. Thus if a passion of fear be up, how doth it conjure up multitudes of ghostly thoughts which we cannot conjure down again, nor hide our eyes from, but which haunt us, and follow us up and down wherever we go, so as a man runs away pursued by his own thoughts; 'the heart meditates on terror,' as Isa. 33:18. So when sorrow is up, how doth it make us study the cross that lights upon us, which to forget would be an ease unto the mind! But a man's passions make his thoughts to con it, and to say it by heart, over and over again, as if it would not have us forget it. So when love and desire is up, be the thing what it will we are taken with, as preferment, credit, beauty, riches, it sets out thoughts a-work to view the thing all over, from top to toe, as we say, to observe every part and circumstance that doth make it amiable unto us, as if a picture were to be drawn of it. So when joy is up, we view the thing we rejoice in, and read it over and over, as we do a book we like, and we mark every tittle, we are punctual in it; yea, so inordinate are we herein, as often we cannot sleep for thinking

on them. Eccles. 5:12, 'Abundance of riches will not suffer him to sleep, for the multitude of thoughts in his head,' speaking of a man who is covetous. How do thoughts trouble the Belshazzars and Nebuchadnezzars of the world! Dan. 4:19. So, Prov. 4:16, 'They sleep not unless they have done mischief;' if their desires remain unsatisfied, they do disturb their thoughts, like froward children by their crying. So as often these which men count free, as the most do thoughts, do prove the greatest bondage and torment in the earth unto them, and do hinder sleep, the nurse of nature, eat out and live upon the heart that bred them, weary the spirits, that when a man shall say, (as Job 7:13,) 'My bed shall comfort me,' by putting a parenthesis to his thoughts and sad discourses which he hath when awake, yet then they haunt a man, and, as ver. 14, 'terrify him.' A man cannot lay them aside as he doth his cloak: and when men die they will follow them to hell, and torment them worse there; your thoughts are one of the greatest executioners there, even 'the worm that dies not.'

(3.) The vanity of the mind appears in curiosity, a longing and itching to be fed with, and to know, and then delighting to think of, things that do not at all concern us. Take an experiment of this in scholars, whose chief work lies in this shop: how many precious thoughts are spent this way! as in curiosity of knowledge, as appears by those the apostle often rebukes, that affect, as 1 Tim. 6:4, 20, 'oppositions of science falsely so called,' curiosities of knowledge 'of things they have not seen.' So, Col. 2 and 1 Tim. 4:7, he calls such issues of men's brains they dote on, 'old wives' fables;' because, as fables please old wives, so do these their minds, and of that itch they have in them, even as women with child, in their longings, content not themselves with what the place affords or the season, with what may be had, but often long after some unheard-of rarity, far fetched, or, it may be, not at all to be had. Thus men, not contenting themselves with the wonders of God discovered in the depth of his word and works, they will launch into another sea and world of their own making, and there they sail with pleasure, as many of the school-men did in some of their speculations, spending their precious wits in framing curious webs out of their own bowels.

Take another instance also in others, who have leisure and parts to read much: they should ballast their hearts with the word, and take in those

more precious words and wisdom and sound knowledge to profit themselves and others, and to build upon their own souls, and whereby they may be enabled to serve their country; but now what do their curious fancies carry them unto, to be versed in, but play-books, jeering pasquils, romances, feigned stays,* which are the curious needlework of idle brains, so as they load their heads with 'apes and peacocks' feathers,' instead of pearls and precious stones; so as a man may say as Solomon, Prov. 15:14, 'The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness.' Foolish discourses please their ears and eyes to read; all these being but purveyors, as it were, for food for the thoughts: like chameleons, men live on air and wind.

To leave them: how do others out of mere curiosity to know and please their thoughts, listen after all the news that flies up and down the world, scum all the froth that floats in foolish men's mouths, and please themselves only with talking, thinking, and hearing of it?

I do not condemn all herein: some their ends are good, and they can make use of it, and do as Nehemiah did, who inquired how things went at Jerusalem, to rejoice with God's people, and mourn with them, and pray for them, and to know how to fashion their prayers accordingly. But I condemn that curious itch that is in them, when it is done but merely to please their fancies; which is much delighted with new things, though they concern us not. Such the Athenians were, Acts 17:21. How do some men long all the week till they have events and issues, and make it a great part of the happiness of their lives to study the state more than their own hearts, and affairs of their callings; who take actions of state as their text to study the meaning of, and to preach on wherever they come! I speak of those that yet lay not to heart the miseries of the church of Christ, nor help them with their prayers, if at any time they happen.

The like curiosity is seen in many, in desiring to know the secrets of other men, which yet would do them no good to know, and who do study men's actions and ends, not to reform, or do good to them, but to know them, and think and muse thereof, when alone, with pleasure. This is curiosity, and properly a vanity of the thinking power, which it mainly pleaseth; and is indeed a great sin, when much of men's most pleasing thoughts are

spent on things that concern them not. For the things we ought to know, and which do concern us, are enough to take up all our thoughts alone, neither shall we have any to spare: and thoughts are precious things, the immediate fruits and buds of an immortal nature; and God hath given us power to coin them, to lay them out in things that concern our own good, and of our neighbours, and his own glory; and thus not to spend them is the greatest waste in the world. Examine what corn you put in to grind, for God ought to have toll of all. Prov. 24:8, 'He that deviseth evil shall be called a mischievous person,' not always he that doth a mischievous action, but that deviseth it; and, ver. 9, he aggravates it, *à minori*, 'for every thought is sin:' then a combination and conspiracy of wicked thoughts is much more. But—

(4.) There is a worse vanity than this, and that is that intimated, Rom. 13:14, 'Taking thought to fulfil the lusts of the flesh,' *πρόνοιαν ποιῆσθαι*, to make projects for it. For thoughts are the caterers for our lusts, and lay in all their provision; they are they that look out where the best markets are, the best opportunities for sinning in any kind, the best bargains for credit, for preferment, for riches, &c. For example, would a man rise? His thoughts study the art of it, men frame their own ladder to climb withal, invent ways how to do it; though often it proves, as to Haman, their own gallows. Would they be rich, what do they study? Even all cheats and tricks on the cards, as I may so speak; that is, all the cunning tricks of the world, all the ways of oppressing, defrauding, and going beyond their brethren, so to pack things in all their dealings, that they themselves should be the winners, and those that deal with them the losers. Isa. 32:7, it is said, that 'the instruments of the churlish are evil, and he deviseth wicked devices to destroy the poor.' Would a man undermine his opposite, as one that stands in his light, and who hinders his credit? He'll dig and fall a-pioning, with his thoughts, his engines, in the night; dig a pit, as the Scripture phrase is, and dig deep to hide his counsel, to blow him up in the end, and so as he shall not know who hurt him. And this is worse than all the former, this studied, artificial villany. The more devising there is in sin, the worse; therefore the fact about Uriah, not so much that of Bathsheba, is objected against David, because he used art in it; he 'took thought for it,' but, in the matter of Bathsheba, thoughts took him.

(5.) The fifth is the representing or acting over sins in our thoughts and imaginations, personating those pleasures by imagination which at present we enjoy not really, feigning and imagining ourselves to act those sinful practices we have not opportunity outwardly to perform; speculative wickedness, divines do call it; which to be in the power of imagination to do is evident to you by your dreams, when fancy plays its part most, and, to allude to what the prophet says, makes us believe 'we eat when we are an hungry, and drink when our souls are thirsty,' Isa. 29:8. But I mean not to speak of the power and corruption of it, as in our dreams; it were well if, as the Apostle speaks of drunkenness, this speculative wickedness were only 'in the night.' But corrupt and distempered affections do cast men into such dreams in the day, and when they are awake; there are then, to borrow the Apostle's expression, 'filthy dreams,' Jude 8, that 'defile the flesh,' even when awake; when, their lusts wanting work, their fancy erects to them a stage, and they set their imaginations and thoughts a-work to entertain their filthy and impure desires with shows and plays of their own making, and so reason and the intention of their minds sit as spectators all the while to view with pleasure, till their thoughts inwardly act over their own unclean desires, ambitious projects, or whatever else they have a mind unto.

So vain and empty is the heart of man become; so impatient are our desires and lusts of interruption in their pleasures; so sinful and corrupt!

First, Vain and empty it appears to be in this; for take all the pleasures of sin, when they are never so fully, solidly, really, and substantially enjoyed, they are but shadows, a mere outside and figure, as the Apostle calls the world. It is opinion of imagination that casts that varnish of goodness on them which is not truly in them. So Felix* and Bernice's pomp is termed πολυφαντασία. But now this speculative enjoying of them only in imagination, (which many men's hearts take so much pleasure in,) the pleasing ourselves in the bare thoughts and imaginations of them, this is but a shadow of these shadows. That the soul should, Ixion-like, embrace and commit adultery with clouds only, this is a vanity beyond all other vanities, that maketh us vainer than other creatures, who though 'subject to vanity,' yet not to such as this.

Secondly, It argues our desires to be impatient, to be detained from, or

interrupted of their pleasures. When the soul shall be found so greedy that when the heart is debarred or sequestered from those things it desires, and wants means or opportunities to act its lusts, as not being to stay, it will at least enjoy them in imagination, and in the interim set fancy to entertain the mind with empty pictures of them drawn in its own thoughts.

Thirdly, Thus they appear also to be exceeding sinful and corrupt. An outward act of sin, it is but as an act of whoredom with the creature when really enjoyed; but this is incest, when we defile our souls and spirits with these imaginations and likenesses which are begotten in our own fancies, being the children of our own hearts.

And yet, my brethren, such speculative enjoying of pleasures, and acting over of sins, the mind of man is full of, as will appear in many particulars.

First, Look what comforts men have at present in their possession and at command, what excellencies or endowments, men love to be alone to study and think of them; and when they are sequestered from the present use of them, yet they will then be again and again recounting and casting of them up, taking a survey of their happiness in them, applauding their own hearts in their conditions. And as rich men that love money, love to be looking on it, and telling it over; so do men to be summing up their comforts and privileges they enjoy, which others want: as how rich they are, how great, how they excel others in parts and gifts, &c. Oh, how much of that precious sand of our thoughts runs out this way! Thus he in the gospel, he keeps an audit in his heart: 'Soul,' saith he, 'thou hast goods laid up for many years.' So Haman, Esther 5:11, takes an inventory of his honours and goods; he talks of 'all the glory of his riches, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him.' So Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 4:30, as it may seem, he was alone walking and talking to himself like a fool, saying to himself, 'Is not this the great Babel which I have built by the might of my power, for the glory of my majesty?'

And as thus upon their comforts, so also upon their excellencies, as their learning, wisdom, parts, &c. Men love to stand looking upon these in the glass of their own speculation, as fair faces love to look often and long in looking-glasses: which, as it ariseth from the self-flattery is in men, so

also that they might keep their happiness still fresh and continued in their eye; which thoughts, when they raise not up the heart to thankfulness to God, and are not used to that end, but are bellows of pride, they are vain and abominable in the eyes of God, as appears by God's dealing with those before-mentioned; for to the one he says, 'Thou fool, this night;' the other, 'whilst the word was in his mouth,' (giving him no longer warning,) he strikes with madness and brutishness: and Haman, you know, was like a wall that doth swell before it breaks and falls to ruin and decay.

Secondly, This speculative enjoying of pleasures, and acting over sins thus in fancy, doth appear in regard of things to come; which when we have in view, or any hopes of men's thoughts go forth before to meet them, with how much contentment do men's thoughts entertain their desires; with vain promisings and expectations beforehand of their pleasures that are in view, and in possibility to be enjoyed! So they in Isaiah wind up their hearts to a higher pin of jollity in the midst of their cups, in that their hearts thought and promised them, 'To-morrow shall be as to-day, and much more abundant,' chap. 56:12. So they, James 4:13, they say with themselves, 'We will go to such a city, and continue there a year, and get gain.' And the promise of this, and the thoughts of it beforehand, feeds them, and keeps up their heart in comfort. When men rise in a morning, they begin to fore-think with much pleasure what carnal pleasures they have the advowson and promise of that day or week; as to go to such company and there be merry, to go such a pleasant journey, enjoy satisfaction in such a lust, hear such news, &c. And thus, as godly men 'live by faith' in God's promises, Hab. 2:4; Isa. 38:16, 'By these men live, and this is the spirit of my life,' saith Hezekiah, even 'what God hath spoken,' ver. 15: so do carnal men live much upon the promises of their own hearts and thoughts beforehand, for to this head of vain thoughts these vain promisings are to be reduced, Ps. 49:11, 'Their inward thought is, their houses shall continue for ever,' and this thought pleaseth them. What pleasure almost is there, which a man makes much account of, but he acts it first over in private in his own thoughts? And thus do men foolishly take their own words and promises; and so 'befool themselves in the end,' as Jeremiah speaks, chap. 17:11. coupon trust, the pleasures they are to enjoy, even as spendthrifts do their rents, or heirs

their revenues before they come of age to enjoy their lands, that when they come indeed to enjoy the pleasures they expected, either they prove but 'dreamers,' as Isa. 29:8, they find their 'souls empty,' or so much under their expectation, and so stale, as they have little in them, that there still proves more in the imagination than in the thing, which ariseth from the vastness and greediness of men's desires, as the cause hereof; for that makes them swallow up all at once. So, Hab. 2:5, 'Enlarging his desires as hell, he heaps up all nations, swallows them up in his thoughts.' So an ambitious scholar doth all preferments that are in his view.

Thirdly, This speculative wickedness is exercised in like manner towards things past, in recalling, namely, and reviving in our thoughts the pleasure of sinful actions passed; when the mind runs over the passages and circumstances of the same sins, long since committed, with a new and fresh delight; when men raise up their dead actions, long since buried, in the same likeness they were transacted in, and parley with them, as the witch and Saul did with Satan in Samuel's likeness. And whereas they should draw cross lines over them, and blot them out through faith in Christ's blood, they rather copy and write them over again in their thoughts with the same contentment. So an unclean person can study and view over every circumstance passed in such an act, with such a person committed; so a vainglorious scholar doth repeat in his thoughts an eminent performance of his, and all such passages therein as were most elegant. And thus men chew the cud upon any speech of commendation uttered by others of them. And all this even as a good heart doth repeat good things heard or read, with the remembrance also of what quickness they had in such and such passages, and with what affections they were warmed, when they heard them; or as a godly man recalls with comfort the actions of a well-passed life, as Hezekiah did, 'Lord, I have walked before thee with a perfect heart;' and thereby do also stir and provoke their hearts to the like temper again. So, on the contrary, do wicked men use to recall and revive the pleasingest sinful passages in their lives, to suck a new sweetness out of them. Than which nothing argues more hardness or wickedness of heart, or provokes God more. For

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1. It argues much wickedness of heart, and such as, when it is ordinary

with the heart to do thus, is not compatible with grace; for in the 6th of the Romans, ver. 21, the Apostle shews that a good heart useth to repeat no such fruit of sinful actions past: 'But what fruit had you of those things whereof ye are now ashamed?' The saints reap and distil nothing out of all those flowers but shame and sorrow, and sad sights: when Ephraim remembered his sin, he was 'ashamed and repented;' and canst thou, in thy thoughts, reap a new harvest and crop of pleasure out of them again and again?

2. It argues much hardness of heart; nothing being more opposite to the truth and practice of repentance, the foundation of which is to call to mind the sin with shame and sorrow, and to recall it with much more grief than ever there was pleasure in the committing of it; and whose property is to 'hate the appearance' of it, and to inflame the heart with zeal and revenge against it. And thereby it provoketh God exceedingly, our hearts are thereby imbrued in a new guilt, we thereby stand to and make good our former act: even so, by remembering it with pleasure, we provoke God to remember it with a new detestation of it, and so to send down new plagues; who, if we recall it with grief, would 'remember it no more.' We shew we take delight to rake in those wounds we have given Christ already. To view the sins of others with pleasure, Rom. 1:32, is made more than to commit them; but much more to view and revive our own with a fresh delight: and therefore know, that however you may take delight here to repeat to yourselves your old sins, yet that in hell nothing will gall you more than the remembrance of them; every circumstance in every sin will then be as a dagger at thy heart. This was the rich man's task and study in hell, to 'remember the good things he had received,' and his sins committed in the abuse of them. And if godly men here be made to 'possess the sins of their youth' with horror, as Job, and to 'have them ever before them,' as David, how will wicked men be continually affrighted with them in hell?—whose punishment is in a great part set forth to us by Ps. 50:21, 'I will set them in order before thee.'

Fourthly, The fourth thing wherein the speculative vanity appears is in acting sins upon mere imaginary suppositions. Men feign and contrive to themselves, and make a supposition to themselves in their own thoughts, first of what they would be, and then what they would do. Men create

fool's paradises to themselves, and then walk up and down in them: as, if they had money enough, what pleasures they would have! if they were in such places of preferment, how they would carry themselves!—to allude to that Absalom said, 2 Sam. 15:4, 'Oh, if I were a judge in the land, I would do this or that,' &c.,—doing this with a great deal of pleasure, almost as much as those that really enjoy them. This may well be the meaning of Psalm 50:18, where of the hypocrite, who outwardly abstains from gross sins, it is said that 'he consenteth with the thief, and partaketh with the adulterer,' namely, in his heart and fancy, supposing himself with them, and so desires to be doing what they do. Thus take one who is naturally ambitious, whom both nature, parts, and education have all made but 'a bramble, never to rule over the trees,' and hath fixed in a lower sphere, as incapable of rising higher or being greater as the earth is of becoming a star in heaven; yet he will take upon him in his own heart, feigning and supposing himself to be, and then act the part of a great man there, erect a throne, and sit down in it, and thinks with himself what he would do if a king or a great man, &c. So take a man that is unclean, but now grown old, and a dry tree, and so cannot act his lust as formerly, yet his thoughts shall supply what is wanting in his strength or opportunity. And he makes his own heart both bawd, brothel-house, whore, whoremonger, and all. So a man that is naturally voluptuous, loves pleasures, but wants means to purchase them, yet his inclinations will please themselves with the thoughts of what mixture and composition of delights he would have; he will set down with himself his bill of fare, how he would have, if he might wish, his cup of pleasure mingled, what ingredients put into it. So a man that is revengeful, and yet wants a sting, yet he pleaseth himself with revengeful thoughts and wishes, and will be making invectives and railing dialogues against him he hates when he is not by. A man in love, in his fancy he will court his paramour though absent, he will by his imagination make her present, and so frame solemn set speeches to her.

In a word, let men's inclinations and dispositions be of what kind soever, and let the impossibilities and improbabilities be never so great of being what they desire; yet in their fancies and thoughts they will discover themselves what they would be. Totumque quod esse desiderant sibi apud semetipsos cogitationibus depingunt; men will be drawing maps of

their desires, calculating their own inclinations, cut out a condition of life which fills their hearts, and they please themselves withal. And there is no surer way to know a man's natural inclination than by this.

1. Which yet, first, is as great a folly as any other, imitating children herein; for is it not childish to make clay pies and puppets, (what else are such fancies as these?) and to be as children acting the parts of ladies and mistresses? And yet such childishness is in men's hearts.

2. And, secondly, a vanity also, because a man sets his heart on what is not; the things themselves are not, if a man had them, Prov. 23:5: but to please themselves with suppositions is much worse.

3. Thirdly, this argues the greatest incontentation of mind that may be, when men will in their own thoughts put themselves into another condition than God ever ordained for them.

Uses: The Good of Knowing the Vanity of Thoughts

Use 1.—Having discovered the vanity of your thoughts and your estates thereby, be humbled for them. This I ground upon Prov. 30:32, where Agur teacheth us to humble ourselves as well for thoughts as actions: 'If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thy hand upon thy mouth.' Now as 'smiting upon the thigh' is put for repentance, and shame, and sorrow in Ephraim Jer. 31:19; so is laying the hand upon the mouth put for greater and deeper humiliation as arguing full conviction of one's guilt: Rom. 3:19, 'Every mouth must be stopped.' Having nothing to say, not to plead and excuse that thoughts are free, and it is impossible to be rid of them, &c., but, as Ezek. 16:63, 'to remember, and to be confounded, and never to open thy mouth more,'—to be vile, and not to answer again, as Job 40:4,—this is to lay thy hand on thy mouth; that is, to humble thyself.

And indeed there is much cause; for your thoughts, they are the first-begotten and eldest sons of original sin, and therefore 'the strength' of it, as Jacob called Reuben the first-born: yea, also, and the parents and

begetters of all other sins, their brethren; the first plotters and contrivers, and Ahithophels, in all the treasons and rebellions of our hearts and lives; the bellows and incendiaries of all inordinate affections; the panders to all our lusts, that take thought to provide for the satisfying of them; the disturbers in all good duties, that interrupt, and spoil, and fly-blow all our prayers, that they stink in the nostrils of God.

And if their heinousness will nothing move you, consider their number, for they are continually thus; which makes our sins to be in number more than the sands; the thoughts of Solomon's heart were as the sand, and so ours; not a minute but as many thoughts pass from us as in a minute sands do in an hour-glass. So that suppose that, taken severally, they be the smallest and least of your sins, yet their multitude makes them more and heavier than all your other. Nothing smaller than a grain of sand, but if there be a heap of them, there is nothing heavier: Job 6:3, 'My grief is heavier than the sand.' Suppose they be in themselves but as farthing tokens in comparison of gross defilements, yet because the mint never lies still, sleeping or waking, therefore they make up the greatest part of that treasure of wrath which we are a-laying up: and know, that God will reckon every farthing, and in thy punishment bate thee not one vain thought. And that God looks upon our thoughts thus, see but the indictment he brings in against the old world, which stands still upon record, Gen. 6. When he pronounced that heavy judgment of destroying the old world, doth he allege their murders, adulteries, and gross defilements chiefly as the cause? Their thoughts rather; which, because so many and so continually evil, provoked him more than all their other sins. Go down therefore into thy heart, and consider them well, to humble thee, to make thee vile; and if in one room such a treasure of wickedness be found laid up, what in all those other 'chambers of the belly,' as Solomon calls them? Consider them to humble thee, but not, for all this their multitude, to discourage thee. For God hath more thoughts of mercy in him than thou hast had of rebellion: Ps. 40:5, 'Thy thoughts to upward' (speaking of thoughts of mercy) 'are more than can be numbered.' Thou beganst but as yesterday to think thoughts of rebellion against him, but his thoughts of mercy have been 'from everlasting,' and reach 'to everlasting:' and therefore, in Isa. 55:7, having made mention of our thoughts, 'Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts, and he will have

mercy on him,' because this objection of the multitude of them might come in to discourage men from hopes of mercy, therefore purposely he adds, 'he will multiply to pardon;' and to assure us that he hath thoughts of mercy to outvie ours of sin, he adds, 'for my thoughts exceed yours, as heaven doth the earth.'

Use. 2.—Let us make for ever conscience of them; so Job did, chap. 31:1, 'I made a covenant with mine eyes; why should I think upon a maid?' Solomon gives in especial charge, 'Above all keeping, keep thy heart,' Prov. 4:23.

First, Thou art to 'keep the Lord's day holy,' 'thyself unspotted of the world;' to 'keep thy brother;' to 'keep all the commandments;' but, above all, to 'keep thy heart,' and in it thy thoughts, for this is the great commandment, because it extends itself, as the foundation, unto them all: for as in the same commandment where murder is forbidden, a malicious thought is also, and so of the rest; so in keeping the thoughts thou virtually keepest all the commandments. As original sin is said to be forbidden in all the commandments, so are the thoughts taken order for in all.

Secondly, 'Out of it are issues of life;' thoughts and affections are the spring, speeches and actions the stream. As are our thoughts, so are our affections, for these are the bellows; so also our prayers, so all, for they are in the soul as the spirits in the body, they run through all, move all, act all.

Thirdly, If you look to God, our thoughts are that spot of ground which he proclaims himself sole Lord of, and makes it one of his greatest titles that he 'knows them, and judgeth them.' Kings attempt to rule your tongues, to bind your hands, and rule your actions; but God only your thoughts. By them we chiefly sanctify him in our hearts, by them we walk with God; and shall we not make conscience of them?

Fourthly, If you look to the work and power of grace, wherein lies it but in 'bringing every thought into obedience?' 2 Cor. 10:5. This is the glory of our religion above all other in the world. Wherein lies the difficulty of it, the strictness of it, what makes it so hard a task, but the observing and

keeping the thoughts in bounds? Wherein lies the difference between sincere-hearted Christians and others, but the keeping of our thoughts, without which all religion is but 'bodily exercise?' Papists may mumble over their prayers, hypocrites talk, but this is godliness.

Fifthly, If we look to things we have a care of; if we have a care of speeches because Christ hath said we shall 'answer for every idle word,' why not also, for the same reason, should we have a care of thoughts, which are the words of the mind, only they want a shape to be audible to others, which the tongue gives them; for which you must answer as well as for words, Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 4:5. If you be careful what companions you have, and whom you lodge in your houses, and who lie in your bosoms, then much more of your thoughts, which lodge in your hearts, which are not yours but God's houses, built for himself, and for Christ and his word to dwell in; seeing also the things you think of have the most near intimate fellowship and converse with you. And therefore, when you think of the word, it is said to 'talk with you,' Prov. 6:22. If you be careful of what you eat, because such blood you have, &c., then be careful what you think, thoughts being pabulum animæ, as Tully calls them. 'Thy words did I eat,' says Jeremiah, speaking of meditating on it.

Sixthly, If you look to the issue of things; what shall be the subject of that great inquest at the day of judgment? The thoughts and counsels, 1 Cor. 4:5. And after the day of judgment, men's thoughts shall prove their greatest executioners. What are the cords God lashes you with to all eternity? Your own thoughts; thoughts accusing, whereby you study over every sin; and every one will be as a dagger, Isa. 33:18. The hypocrite's torment is to 'meditate terrors,' to study God's wrath, and the saints' blessedness, and their own sins and misery.

Remedies against vain thoughts.

The first is to get the heart furnished and enriched with good stock of sanctified and heavenly knowledge in spiritual and heavenly truths; for 'a good man,' saith Christ, hath a 'good treasure in his heart,' Matt. 12:35,—that is, he hath all graces, so many precious truths, which are as gold in the ore, which his thoughts, as the mint, doth coin and beat out, and

which words bring forth. 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things.' If, therefore, there be not mines of precious truths hid in the heart, no wonder if our thoughts coin nothing but dross, frothy, vain thoughts; for better materials, which should feed the mind, are wanting. Therefore, Solomon saith, 'Wicked men forge,' mint, or hammer, 'wickedness,' Prov. 6:14; so Junius reads it. Or if men have store of natural knowledge, and want spiritual useful knowledge to themselves; although in company with others they may bring forth good things in speeches, yet when alone, their thoughts run not on them. For this take a place of Scripture, Deut. 6:6, 7, which shews that laying up the word in the heart, and being much conversant in it, and getting knowledge out of it, is an effectual means to keep our thoughts well exercised when we are alone; for the end why those words of the law are commanded to be 'laid up in the heart,' ver. 5, 6, is, as to teach them to others, so to take up our thoughts when we are most retired and alone, and when a man can do nothing but barely exercise his mind in thinking. For when a man is a-riding, or walking, or lying down, and rising up, (which are often and usually our most retired times for thoughts, and are wholly spent in them, and many ride alone, and lie alone, &c.,) yet then, saith he, thou shalt talk of the word: which command he that is alone cannot do, therefore the talking there meant is not only λόγος προφορικὸς, outward conference with others, (though intended as occasion of talking with others is given,) as to talk to thy bedfellow of it, and to thy companion; but suppose thou hast none, then to talk of it to thyself, for thoughts are λόγοι ἐνδιάθετοι, talking of the mind. And so, comparing Prov. 6:22 with this place, which will fitly interpret it, it appears; for Solomon, exhorting to the same duty of 'binding the word to the heart,' useth this motive, which is the fruit thereof, 'that when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee,'—that is, by thy thinking of it, it will talk with thee when thou and it art alone,—so as thou shalt not need a better companion, it will be putting in and suggesting something.

Secondly, Endeavour to preserve and keep up lively, holy, and spiritual affections in thy heart, and suffer them not to cool: fall not from thy first love, nor fear, nor joy in God; or if thou hast grown remiss, endeavour to recover those affections again. For such as your affections are, such necessarily must your thoughts be; and they incline the mind to think of

such or such objects as will please them, rather than others. Therefore, says David, Ps. 119:97, 'How do I love thy law! it is my meditation day and night.' It was his love to it made him think of it so frequently. So, Mal. 3:16, 'Those that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name,' are joined: for what we fear we often think of, and also speak of often; therefore it is added, 'They spake oft one to another.' Fear made them think much of his name, and thinking of it made them speak of it: such affection, such thoughts, and such speeches as they both are. And, indeed, thoughts and affections are *sibi mutuo causæ*,—the mutual causes of each other: 'Whilst I mused, the fire burned,' Ps. 39; so that thoughts are the bellows that kindle and inflame affections; and then if they are inflamed, they cause thoughts to boil; therefore men newly converted to God, having new and strong affections, can with more pleasure think of God than any.

Thirdly, Of all apprehensions else, get thy heart possessed with deep, strong, and powerful apprehensions and impressions of God's holiness, majesty, omnipresence, and omniscience. If any thoughts be of power to settle, fix, and draw in the mind of man, they are the thoughts of him. What is the reason that the saints and angels in heaven have not a vain thought to eternity, not a wry stroke? His presence fixeth them, their eye is never off him. Take a wanton, garish, loose spirit, let him be but in the presence of a superior whom he fears and reverenceth, and it consolidates him. Job made therefore conscience of his thoughts, that he durst not look awry, chap. 31:1, 2, because God sees it, saith he. This drew in and fastened David's thoughts; Ps. 139:1–12, he manifests what continual apprehensions he had of God's greatness, majesty, and omnipresence. And what effect had this? 'When I awake I am even before thee,' ver. 17. Look what objects they are have most strong and deep impressions in the mind, of those when a man awaketh he thinks of first. Now such strong impressions had David's thoughts of God, that still when he awaked he was with him. And therefore we find it by experience to be a means to avoid distractions in prayers, to enlarge a man's thoughts in his preparations before, or at the beginning, with a consideration of God's attributes and relations to us: and it will and doth make us serious.

Fourthly, Especially do this when thou awakest, as David did there:

'When I awake, I am still with thee.' To prevent wind, which ariseth from emptiness, men use to take a good draught in the morning, which the stomach feeds; so, to prevent those vain, windy, frothy thoughts the heart naturally engenders, and which arise from emptiness, first fill thy heart with the thoughts of God; go down into his wine-cellar. Observe it when you will, when you first open your eyes there stand many suitors attending on you, to speak with your thoughts, even as clients at lawyers' doors, many vanities and businesses; but speak thou with God first, he will say something to thy heart will settle it for all day: and this do before the crowd of businesses come in upon thee. Of some heathens it is said, that they worship that as their god for all day which they first see in the morning; so it is with the idols of men's hearts.

Fifthly, Have a watchful eye, and observe thy heart all day; though they crowd in, yet observe them, let them know that they pass not unseen. If a man would pray aright, he must watch also who comes in and who goes out. Where strict watch and ward is kept, and magistrates observant, the marshal and constable diligent to examine vagrant persons, you shall have few there; that such swarms of vagrant thoughts make their rendezvous, and pass, is because there is not strict watch kept.

This is in a manner all thou canst do, for they will pass however; but yet complain thou of them, whip them, and give them their pass.

Sixthly, Please not thy fancy too much with vanities and curious sights; this engenders vain thoughts: therefore Job says, chap. 31:1, that he 'made a covenant with his eyes, lest he should think of a maid;' Prov. 4:25, 'Let thine eyes look right on.'

Seventhly, Be diligent in thy calling; and 'what thine hand finds to do, do it with all thy might,' as it is, Eccles. 9:10; that is, putting to all the intention and strength of the mind that may be in it. Let all the stream run to ruin about thy mill; the keeping thy thoughts to that channel keeps them from overflowing into vanity and folly. 2 Thess. 3:11, those that labour not are busybodies; and, 1 Tim. 5:13, idle, wandering, περιεργοί; they are not only called ἄργοι, idle only, because not busy about what they should, but περιεργοί, as intent on things they should not; they go from house to house: so their bodies do, because their minds do wander,

having no centre. When David walked alone, what extravagancy did his spirit run into! Let the ground lie fallow, and what weeds will there soon grow in it! God hath appointed us our callings to entertain our thoughts, and to find them work, and to hold them doing in the interims between the duties if his worship, because the spirit and thoughts of men are restless, and will be busied some way. As therefore kings keep those men that have active spirits in continual employment, lest their heads should be working and plotting amiss, so did God appoint even in paradise the active spirit of man a calling to keep him doing. God hereby hedgeth in man's thoughts, and sets them to go in a narrow lane, knowing that if they are unconfined and left at liberty, they would like 'wild asses snuff up the wind,' as Jeremiah speaks, chap. 2:24. Only take heed of encumbering thy mind with too much business, more than thou canst grasp. It made Martha forget that 'one thing necessary,' being 'cumbered with many things,' Luke 10:4. This breeds cares, μέριμνα, which distract the mind, (so the word signifies, ἀπο τοῦ μεριζειν,) as dividing it, and so cause wandering thoughts, nothing more, so that the mind is not itself. For this weakens it, enervates it, and this being vanity,—Exod. 18:18, said Jethro to Moses, when encumbered with business, 'Thou wilt fade away as a leaf,' out of which the moisture is dried up,—even that juice which should be left for good duties will be exhausted. As dreams come through multitude of business, Eccles. 5:3, so do a multitude of thoughts from a cumber of business.

Eighthly, In thy calling, and all thy ways, for the success and thy ways therein, 'commit thy ways to God.' Prov. 16:3, 'Commit thy way unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established,' or ordered; that is, keep from that confusion and disorder, and those swarms of cares, which others are annoyed with, and thereby thy aims may be as well accomplished. A few thoughts of faith would save us many thoughts of cares and fears, in the businesses we go about; which prove therefore vain, because they forward not at all the business we intend. When such waves toss the heart and turmoil it, and the winds of passions are up, if a few thoughts of faith come into the heart, they calm all presently.

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