

Monergism

OF GOD
—
AND HIS
—
PERFECTIONS

THOMAS BOSTON

Monergism

OF GOD
—
AND HIS
—
PERFECTIONS

THOMAS BOSTON

Of God and His Perfections

by Thomas Boston

Table of Contents

[OF GOD AND HIS PERFECTIONS](#)

[OF THE UNITY OF GOD](#)

[OF THE HOLY TRINITY](#)

[OF THE DECREES OF GOD](#)

[OF THE WORK OF CREATION](#)

[OF THE CREATION OF MAN](#)

[OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD](#)

[THE WISE OBSERVATION OF PROVIDENCES, ILLUSTRATED
AND ENFORCED](#)

OF GOD AND HIS PERFECTIONS

JOHN 4:24.—God is a Spirit.

SIMONIDES, a heathen poet, being asked by Hiero king of Syracuse, What is God? desired a day to think upon it; and when that day was at an end, he desired two days; and when these were past, he desired four days. Thus he continued to double the number of days in which he desired to think of God, ere he would give an answer. Upon which the king expressing his surprise at his behaviour, asked him, What he meant by this? To which the poet answered, 'The more I think of God, he is still the more dark and unknown to me.' Indeed no wonder that he made such an answer; for he that would tell what God is in a measure suitable to his excellency and glory, had need to know God even as he is known of him, which is not competent to any man upon earth. Agur puzzles the whole creation with that sublime question, What is his name? Prov. 30:4. But though it is impossible in our present state to know God perfectly, seeing he is incomprehensible; yet so much of him is revealed in the scriptures as is necessary for us to know in order to our salvation.

The text tells us, and it should be remembered, that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who lay in the bosom of the Father, and who only can reveal him, is here the speaker, that God is a Spirit. It is but little of the nature of spirits that we, who dwell in tabernacles of clay, are so intimately connected with flesh and blood, and so naturally impressed with sensible objects, can know. We cannot fully understand what our own spirits or souls are; and less do we know of the nature of angels, who are of a superior nature to us; and far less can we know of the spiritual nature of the Divine Being, which is utterly incomprehensible by men or angels. However, as all our ideas begin at what is infinite, in considering the nature of spirits, so we are led to conceive of God as infinitely more perfect than any finite spirit*. All we can know of spirits is,

1. That a spirit is the most perfect and excellent of beings, more excellent than the body, or any thing that is purely material.
2. That a spirit is in its own nature immortal, having nothing in its frame and constitution tending to dissolution or corruption.

3. That a spirit is capable of understanding, willing, and putting forth actions agreeable to its nature, which no other being can do.

Now these conceptions of the nature of spirits lead us to conceive of God,

1. As a being that is more perfect and excellent than all other spirits and beings. Hence he is said to be incorruptible, Rom. 1:23.; immortal and invisible, 1 Tim. 1:17. He has understanding and will; and so we conceive of him as the creator and governor of all things; which he could not be, if he were not an intelligent and sovereign spirit.

2. Though angels and the souls of men are spirits, yet their excellency is only comparative, that is, they excel the best of all material beings in their nature and properties. But God, as a spirit, is infinitely more excellent than all material beings, and all created spirits. Their perfections are derived from him; and therefore he is called 'the Father of spirits,' Heb. 12:9 and 'the God of the spirits of all flesh,' Numb. 16:22.; and his perfections are underived; and he is independently immortal. Hence it is said of him, that 'he only hath immortality,' 1 Tim. 6:16. He is an infinite spirit; and it can be said of none but him, that 'his understanding is infinite,' Psal. 147:5.

Now, a spirit is an immaterial substance, Luke 24:39.; and seeing whatever God is, he is infinitely perfect in it, he is a most pure spirit. Hence we may infer,

1. That God has no body nor bodily parts. Object. How then are eyes, ears, hands, face, and the like, attributed in scripture to God? Answ. They are attributed to him not properly, but figuratively; they are spoken of him after the manner of men, in condescension to our weakness; but we are to understand them after a sort becoming the Divine Majesty. We are to consider what such bodily parts serve us for, as our eyes for discerning and knowing, our arms for strength, our hands for action, &c. and we are to conceive these things to be in

God infinitely, which these parts serve for in us. Thus, when eyes and ears are ascribed to God they signify his omniscience; his hands denote his power, and his face the manifestation of his love and favour.

2. That God is invisible, and cannot be seen with the eyes of the body, no not in heaven; for the glorified body is still a body, and God a spirit, which is no object of the eyes, more than sound, taste, smell, &c. 1 Tim. 1:17.

3. That God is the most suitable good to the nature of our souls, which are spirits; and can communicate himself, and apply those things to them, which only can render them happy, as he is the God and Father of our spirits.

4. That it is sinful and dishonourable to God, either to make images or pictures of him without us, or to have any image of him in our minds, which our unruly imagination is apt to frame to itself, especially in prayer. For God is the object of our understanding, not of our imagination. God expressly prohibited Israel to frame any similitude or resemblance of him, and tells them, that they had not the least pretence for so doing, inasmuch as they 'saw no similitude of him, when he spake to them in Horeb,' Deut. 4:12, 15, 16. And says the prophet, 'To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?' Isa. 40:18. We cannot form an imaginary idea of our own souls or spirits, which are absolutely invisible to us, and far less of him who is the invisible God, whom no man hath seen or can see. Therefore to frame a picture or an idea of what is invisible, is highly absurd and impracticable: nay, it is gross idolatry, prohibited in the second commandment.

5. That externals in worship are of little value with God, who is a spirit, and requires the heart. They who would be accepted of God must worship him in spirit and in truth, that is, from an apprehension and saving knowledge of what he is in Christ to poor sinners. And this saving knowledge of God in Christ is attainable in

this life: for it is the matter of the divine promise, 'I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord,' Jer. 24:7. 'It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God, John 6:45. And therefore it should be most earnestly and assiduously sought after by us, as, unless we attain to it, we must perish for ever.

That we may know what sort of a spirit God is, we must consider his attributes, which we gather from his word and works, and that two ways: 1. By denying of, and removing from God, in our minds, all imperfection which is in the creatures, Acts 17:29. And thus we come to the knowledge of his incommunicable attributes, so called because there is no shadow or vestige of them in the creatures, such as infinity, eternity, unchangeableness. 2. By attributing unto him, by way of eminency, whatever is excellent in the creatures, seeing he is the fountain of all perfection in them, Psal. 94:9. And thus we have his communicable attributes, whereof there are some vestiges and small scantlings in the creature, as being, wisdom, power, &c. amongst which his spirituality is to be reckoned.

Now, both these sorts of attributes in God are not qualities in him distinct from himself, but they are God himself. God's infinity is God himself, his wisdom is himself; he is wisdom, goodness, 1 John 1:5. Neither are these attributes so many different things in God; but they are each of them God himself: for God swears by himself, Heb. 6:13.; yet he swears by his holiness, Amos 4:2. He creates by himself, Isa. 44:24.; yet he creates by his power, Rom. 1:20. Therefore God's attributes are God himself. Neither are these attributes separable from one another; for though we, through weakness, must think and speak of them separately, yet they are truly but the one infinite perfection of the divine nature, which cannot be separated therefrom, without denying that he is an infinitely perfect being.

We have said that God is a spirit; but angels and the souls of men are spirits too. What then is the difference between them? Why, God is an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable spirit; but angels and souls are but finite, were not from eternity, and are changeable spirits. Now,

these three, infinity, eternity, and immutability, are God's incommunicable attributes, which we are next to explain.

First, God is infinite. Infinity is the having no bounds or limits within which a thing is contained. God then is infinite, i. e. he is whatsoever he is without bounds, limits, or measure, Job 11:7. 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?' We cannot define the presence of God by any certain place, so as to say, Here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, so as to say, Thus far his being reacheth, and no further: but he is every where present, after a most inconceivable manner, even in the deepest darkness, and the closest recesses of privacy. He fills all the innumerable spaces that we can imagine beyond this visible world, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Now God is infinite, (1.) In respect of his being: for of his nature our finite understandings cannot possibly form any adequate conception. This lies hid in rays of such bright and radiant glory, as must for ever dazzle the eyes of those who attempt to look into it. (2.) In respect of place; and therefore he is every where present: 'Can any man hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,' Jer. 23:24. (3.) In respect of time and duration: for the ages of his eternity cannot be numbered, 'nor the number of his years searched out,' Job 36:26. (4.) In respect of all his communicable attributes. Thus the depth of his wisdom cannot be fathomed: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' Rom. 11:33. 'His greatness is unsearchable,' Psal. 145:3. The extent-of his power cannot be reached: 'The thunder of his power who can understand?' Job 26:14. We cannot understand his powerful thunder, one of the lowest displays of his majesty in our region, much less The utmost extent and force of his power, in its terrible effects, especially the power of his anger: 'God is great, and we know him not.' The treasures of the divine goodness cannot be inventoried: 'O how great is thy goodness (says the Psalmist), which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee,

which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! The brightness of God's glory cannot be described; as a full discovery of it would quite overpower the faculties of any mortal in this imperfect state: for man is weak and unworthy of it, weak and could not bear it, guilty and could not but dread it: and therefore God 'holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a cloud upon it, Job 26:9. With what propriety, then did he say to Moses, 'Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live!' Exod. 33:20.

That God is infinite, is evident from the natural notions and dictates of the human mind. Hence the heathens, by the light of nature, attributed this perfection to the Divine Being. Thus one philosopher pronounced him to be a circle whose centre is every where, and whose circumference is no where; which another philosopher thus expressed in clearer terms, God is included in no place, and excluded from none. Which way soever ye turn, says Seneca, ye may take notice of God meeting you; for nothing is void of him: he himself fills all his works, and is present with the whole creation. Remarkable also is the expression of the prince of Latin poets, *Jovis omnia plena*, 'All things are full of God.' This also appears from several passages of scripture; as Deut. 4:39. 'The Lord is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath,' 1 Kings 8:27. 'The heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee,' says Solomon in his prayer to God at the dedication of the temple. See also Psal. 139:4, &c. Jer. 23:23, 24. Again, if God were not infinite and immense, many gross absurdities would follow from the contrary notion; such as, it is inconsistent with his universal providence over the world, by which all things are preserved. 'In him we live, move and have our being,' Acts 17:27. As his providence is over all, his essence must be equally diffusive. It is inconsistent with his supreme perfection. No perfection can be wanting in God: and therefore a limited essence, which is an imperfection, cannot be attributed to him. It is also inconsistent with his immutability: For if he move and recede from one place to another, would he not thereby be mutable? while yet 'with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' Last of all, it would be

inconsistent with his omnipotence. That God can do every thing, is a notion settled in the minds of all; and his essence cannot be less or more confined than his power, and his power cannot be thought to extend farther than his essence.

But some may be ready to say, Does not the scripture say, that God sits in heaven and dwells on high, that heaven is his throne; and does not the Lord's prayer teach us to say, Our Father which art in heaven? Now, how can this agree with his infinity or immensity? I answer, God is indeed said to sit in heaven and to dwell on high; but he is no where said to dwell only in the heavens. It is the court of his majestic presence, not the prison of his essence. There is a three-fold presence of God: A glorious presence, which is peculiar to heaven: A gracious presence, which the saints enjoy on earth: And an essential presence, which is equally and alike in all places. Others may allege, that it is a disparagement to God, to say that he is essentially present in all places and with all creatures, even on the dunghill of the earth, and in the sordid sink of hell with the devils and the damned. To this I would only say, that it is a gross misapprehension of God, and an unaccountable measuring of him by ourselves, to imagine that he is capable of being infected by any thing below. For he is a pure and spotless being. Whatever is nauseous to our senses cannot affect him. Darkness is uncomfortable to us: but the darkness and the light are all one to him. Wickedness may hurt a man; but if we multiply our transgressions, what can we do unto him? Job 35:6, 8. To deny the immensity of God, says one, because of ill-scented places, is to measure God rather by the nicety of sense, than by the sagacity of reason.

Secondly, The next incommunicable attribute of God is eternity. Hence he is called 'the King eternal.' 1 Tim. 1:17. We find other things called eternal. But the eternity of all things besides God is only their having no end, though they had a beginning. Thus angels and the souls of men are eternal, because they shall never have an end. The covenant of grace is eternal, because the mercies of it shall last for ever. The gospel is eternal, because the effects of it shall never wear

away. The redemption by Christ is eternal, for the same reason. And the last judgment is so, because the consequences will be everlasting. But the eternity of God is his being without beginning and without end, Psal. 90:2. 'From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.' He was from everlasting before time, and will remain unto everlasting when time shall be no more; without beginning of life or end of days.

Thirdly, The next incommunicable attribute of God is unchangeableness. God is immutable, that is, always the same, without any alteration. Hence it is said, Jam. 1:17. 'With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,' Mal. 3:6. 'I am the Lord, I change not.' God makes changes upon the creatures, but is liable to no change himself.' Though he alters his dispensations, yet not his nature; but, by one pure and constant act of his will and power, effects what changes he pleases. He is the same in all his perfections, constant to his intentions, steady to his purpose, unchangeably fixed and persevering in all his decrees and resolutions. When God is said to repent in scripture, Gen. 6:6. 1 Sam. 15:11. It denotes only a change of his outward conduct according to his infallible foresight and immutable will. He changes the way of his providential dealings according to the carriage and deportment of his creature, without changing his will, which is the rule of his providence. For otherwise that is an eternal truth, Num. 23:19. 'God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent,' 1 Sam. 15:29. 'The Strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent; for he is not a man, that he should repent.'

Having taken a short view of the incommunicable attributes of God, I proceed now to consider those that are called communicable, viz. his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Now these things are in the creatures indeed, but they are in them in a finite way; but God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in these perfections, which no creature is or can be.

First, There is his being which is his nature or essence and existence, which are but one thing in God. Creatures indeed have a being, but it

is only a finite being, a being that has a beginning, a changeable one, and that may have an end. But God's being is an infinite being, eternal and unchangeable. Hence he calls himself, Exod. 3:14. I AM THAT I AM. Hence we may infer,

1. That God is incomprehensible, and his essence infinite and unbounded, Psal. 145:3. 'His greatness is unsearchable.' It is not possible for a finite understanding to comprehend all that is in God; but the nature of God is a boundless ocean that hath no shore, Job 11:7. 'Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?' And though God perfectly knows himself, that is because his understanding is infinite.

2. God is omnipresent and immense. He is present every where, but bounded no where, not only in respect of his virtue or influence, but of his essence. This clearly appears from the following passages, Psal. 139:7, 8, 9, 10. 'Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there: If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' Jer. 23:23, 24. 'Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord; do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord, 1 Kings 8:27. 'Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee.' He is there where the thief is stealing, the unclean person gratifying his base lusts, &c. though they see him not, and think themselves secure when no other eyes see them.

3. There is no succession in the duration of God; for where there is not a first, there cannot be a second moment of duration; but God is eternal: And there can be no succession of time in God's duration, if he be unchangeable; for that is a continual change. See 2 Pet. 3:8. 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'

4. God is independent, or self-sufficient. His being and perfections are underived, and not communicated to him, as all finite perfections are by him to the creature. This self-existence, or independence, is one of the highest glories of the divine nature, by which he is distinguished from all creatures, who live, move, and have their being in and from him. Therefore all our springs are in him, all that we enjoy or hope for is from him; and we should be entirely devoted to his service and honour.

5. Lastly, This doctrine affords full breasts of consolation to the godly, who have an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable friend, who will never leave nor forsake them, but render them completely blessed at last, and confirm them in that happy state for ever. And here is unspeakable terror to those whose enemy this great and eternal God is; for being his enemies, and dying in their rebellion, they shall suffer the whole vengeance and wrath threatened in his word, which he liveth for ever to inflict; and he will never alter what he hath threatened. O let sinners be now persuaded to make this infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God, their friend through Jesus Christ, and so they shall infallibly escape the wrath that is to come.

Secondly, The next communicable attribute of God is wisdom. The personal wisdom of God is Christ, 1 Cor. 1:24. But this is his essential wisdom, which is that attribute of God whereby he knows himself, and all possible things, and how to dispose all things to the best ends. Hence he is said to 'know all things,' John 21:17 and to be 'God only wise,' Rom. 16:27. Now, God is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom, Psal. 147:5. 'His understanding is unsearchable.'

The wisdom of God appears,

1. In the works of creation. The universe is a bright mirror wherein the wisdom of God may be clearly seen. 'The Lord by wisdom made the heavens,' Psal. 136:5. 'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens,' Prov. 3:19. 'He hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out

the heavens by his discretion.' More particularly, the wisdom of God appears, (1.) In the vast variety of creatures which he hath made. Hence the Psalmist cries out, 'How manifold are thy works, O Lord! in wisdom hast thou made them all,' Psal. 104:24. (2.) In the admirable and beautiful order and situation of the creatures. God hath marshalled every thing in its proper place and sphere. For instance, the sun, by its position displays the infinite wisdom of its Creator. It is placed in the midst of the planets, to enlighten them with its brightness, and inflame them with its heat, and thereby derive to them such benign qualities as make them beneficial to all mixed bodies. If it were raised as high as the stars, the earth would lose its prolific virtue, and remain a dead carcass for want of its quickening heat; and if it were placed as low as the moon, the air would be inflamed with its excessive heat, the waters would be dried up, and every planet scorched. But at the due distance at which it is placed, it purifies the air, abates the superfluities of the waters, temperately warms the earth, and so serves all the purposes of life and vegetation. It could not be in another position without the disorder and hurt of universal nature. Again, the expansion of the air from the ethereal heavens to the earth is another testimony of divine wisdom: for it is transparent and of a subtile nature, and so a fit medium to convey light and celestial influences to this lower world. Moreover, the situation of the earth doth also trumpet forth the infinite wisdom of its Divine Maker: for it is as it were the pavement of the world, and placed lowermost, as being the heaviest body, and fit to receive the weightiest matter. (3.) In fitting every thing for its proper end and use, so that nothing is unprofitable and useless. After the most diligent and accurate inquiry into the works of God, there is nothing to be found superfluous, and there is nothing defective. (4.) In the subordination of all its parts, to one common end. Though they are of different natures, as lines vastly distant in themselves, yet they all meet in one common centre, namely, the good and preservation of the whole, Hos. 2:21, 22. 'I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel.'

2. In the government of the world. God sits in his secret place, surrounded with clouds and darkness, holding the rudder of the world in his hand, and steering its course through all the floatings and tossings of casualty and contingency to his own appointed ends. There he grasps and turns the great engine of nature, fastening one pin and loosing another, moving and removing the several wheels of it, and framing the whole according to the eternal idea of his own understanding. By his governing providence he directs all the actions of his creatures; and, by the secret and efficacious penetration of the divine influence, he powerfully sways and determines them which way he pleases.

3. In the work of redemption. This is the very masterpiece of Divine wisdom; and here shines the manifold or diversified wisdom of God, Eph. 3:10. It appears, (1.) In the contrivance thereof. When man had ruined himself by sin, all the wisdom of men and angels could never have devised a method for his recovery. Heaven seemed to be divided upon this awful event. Mercy inclined to save man, but Justice interposed for satisfaction. Justice pleaded the law and the curse, by which the souls of sinners are forfeited to vengeance. Mercy, on the other hand, urged, Shall the Almighty build a glorious work, and suffer it to lie in eternal ruins? shall the most excellent creature in the inferior world perish through the subtilty of a malicious and rebellious spirit? shall that arch-rebel triumph for ever, and raise his trophies from the final ruin of the works of the Most High? Shall the reasonable creature lose the fruition of God, and God lose the subjection and service of his creature? and, shall all mankind be made in vain? Mercy further pleaded, That if the rigorous demands of Justice be heard, it must lie an obscure and unregarded attribute in the divine essence for ever; that it alone must be excluded, while all the rest of the attributes had their share of honour. Thus the case was infinitely difficult, and not to be unravelled by the united wit of all the celestial spirits. A bench of angels was incapable to contrive a method of reconciling infinite mercy with inflexible justice, of satisfying the demands of the one, and granting the requests of the other. In this hard exigence the wisdom of God interposed, and in

the vast treasure of its incomprehensible light, found out an admirable expedient to save man without prejudice to the other divine perfections. The pleas of Justice, said the wisdom of God, shall be satisfied in punishing, and the requests of Mercy shall be granted in pardoning. Justice shall not complain for want of punishment, nor Mercy for want of compassion; I will have an infinite sacrifice to content Justice, and the virtue and fruit of that sacrifice shall delight mercy. Here justice shall have punishment to accept, and Mercy shall have pardon to bestow. My Son shall die, and satisfy justice by his death; and by the virtue and merit of that sacrifice sinners shall be received into favour, and herein Mercy shall triumph and be glorified. Here was the most glorious display of wisdom. (2.) In the ordination of a Mediator every way fitly qualified to reconcile men unto God. A mediator must be capable of the sentiments and affections of both the parties he is to reconcile, and a just esteemer of the rights and injuries of the one and the other, and have a common interest in both. The Son of God, by his incarnation, perfectly possesses all these qualities. He hath a nature to please God, and a nature to please sinners. He had both the perfections of the Deity, and all the qualities and sinless infirmities of the humanity. The one fitted him for things pertaining to God, and the other furnished him with a sense of the infirmities of man.—This union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ was necessary to fit and qualify him for the discharge of his threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King.—As a Prophet, it was requisite he should be God, that so he might acquaint us with his Father's will, and reveal the secret purposes and hidden counsels of heaven concerning our salvation, which were locked up in the bosom of God from all eternity. And it was needful he should be man, that he might converse with poor sinners in a familiar manner, and convey the mind and counsels of God to them, in such a way as they could receive them.—As a Priest, he behoved to be a man, that so he might be capable to suffer, and to bear the wrath which the sins of the elect had justly deserved. And it behoved him to be God, to render his temporary sufferings satisfactory. The great dignity and excellency of the divine Mediator's person made his sufferings of infinite value in God's account. Though

he only suffered as a man, yet he satisfied as God.—As a King, he must be God, to conquer Satan, convert an elect world, and effectually subdue the lusts and corruptions of men. And he must be man, that by the excellency of his example, he might lead us in the way of life. (3.) In the manner whereby this redemption is accomplished, namely, by the humiliation of the Son of God. By this he counteracted the sin of angels and men. Pride is the poison of every sin: for in every transgression the creature prefers his pleasure to and sets up his own will above God's. This was the special sin of Adam. The devil would have levelled heaven by usurpation. He said in his heart, I will be like the Most High; and man infected with his breath (when he said, Ye shall be like gods) became sick of the same disease. Now, the Divine Redeemer, that he might cure our disease in its source and cause by the quality of the remedy, applied to our pride an unspeakable humility. Man was guilty of the highest robbery in affecting to be equal with God; and the Son, who was in the bosom of God, and equal to him in majesty and authority, emptied himself by assuming the human nature in its servile state, Phil. 2:6, 7, 8. It is said, John 1:14. 'The word was made flesh.' The meanest part of our nature is specified to signify the greatness of his abasement. There is such an infinite distance between God and flesh, that the condescension is as admirable as the contrivance. So great was the malignity of human pride, that such a profound humility was requisite for the cure of it. And by this Christ destroyed the works of the devil. (4.) In appointing such contemptible, and in appearance opposite means, to bring about such glorious effects. The way is as admirable as the work. Christ ruined the devil's empire by the very same nature that he had vanquished, and by the very means which he had made use of to establish and confirm it. He took not upon him the nature of angels, which is equal to Satan in strength and power; but he took part of flesh and blood, that he might the more signally triumph over that proud spirit in the human nature, which was inferior to his, and had been vanquished by him in paradise. For this end he did not immediately exercise omnipotent power to destroy him, but managed our weakness to foil the roaring lion. He did not enter the lists with Satan in the glory of his Deity, but

disguised under the human nature which was subject to mortality. And thus the devil was overcome in the same nature over which he first got the victory. For as the whole race of mankind was captivated by him in Adam the representative, so believers are made victorious over him by the conquest which their representative obtained in the whole course of his sufferings. As our ruin was effected by the subtlety of Satan, so our recovery is wrought by the wisdom of God, who takes the wise in their own craftiness. Thus eternal life springs from death, glory from ignominy, and blessedness from a curse. We are healed by stripes, quickened by death, purchased by blood, crowned by a cross, advanced to the highest honour by the lowest humility, comforted by sorrows, glorified by disgrace, absolved by condemnation, and made rich by poverty. Thus the wisdom of God shines with a radiant brightness in the work of redemption.

I shall conclude this point with a few inferences.

1. God is omniscient; 'he knows all things,' John 21:17. 'All things are naked and open to him,' Heb. 4:13. His eye sees us wherever we are. Even future contingencies, as well as the most necessary things are known to him. This is beautifully described by the Psalmist, Psal. 139:1–10 which deserves your serious perusal.

2. His knowledge of all things is not conjectural, but infallible, Rom. 11:33, 34. 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, who hath been his counsellor?' There is nothing to him contingent or uncertain; but every thing falls out exactly according to his foreknowledge and predetermination.

3. It is altogether independent on the creature, whose motions and operations were known to him from eternity, and are all regulated by his counsel.

4. Lastly, To this wise God we may safely entrust all our concerns, knowing he will manage them all so as to promote his own glory and our real good.

Thirdly, The next communicable perfection of God is power, whereby he can do whatever he pleases, and whatsoever is not repugnant to his nature, Jer. 32:17. 'Ah, Lord God, behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth, by thy great power and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee.' He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in power; which the scripture holds forth, 1. Positively, Gen. 17:1. 'I am the Almighty God.' 2. Negatively, Luke 1:37. 'With God nothing shall be impossible.' 3. Comparatively, Matt. 19:26. 'With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.'

The power of God appears,

1. In the creation of the world, Rom. 1:20. 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.' O how great must that power be, which produced the beautiful fabric of the universe, without the concurrence of any material cause! This proclaims it to be truly infinite: for nothing less could make such distant extremes as nothing and being to meet together. All this was done by a word, one simple act of his will; for 'he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast,' Psal. 33:9.

2. In the preservation of the world, and all things therein. He 'upholdeth all things by the word of his power,' Heb. 1:3. He preserves all the creatures in their proper place, for their proper use and end. It is by the Divine Power that the heavenly bodies have constantly rolled about in their spheres for so many ages, without wearing or moving out of their proper course; and that the tumultuous elements have persisted in their order to this very day. He preserves the confederacies of nature, sets bounds to the raging sea, and keeps it within its limits by a girdle of sand. He is the powerful preserver of man and beast. He preserves them in their

kind and species, by the constant succession of them one after another; so that, though the individuals perish, yet the species continues. O what a mighty power must that be that sustains so many creatures, sets bounds to the raging sea, holds the wind in his fists, and preserves a comely order and sweet harmony among all the creatures!

3. In the government of the world. He is the supreme Rector of the universe, and manages all things, so that they contribute to the advancement of his own glory, and the advantage of his people. By his governing providence he directs all the actions and motions of his creatures, and powerfully determines them which way soever he pleases. All the creatures are called his host, because he marshals them as an army to serve his important purposes. The whole system of nature is ready to favour and act for men when he commands it, and it is ready to punish them when he gives it a commission. Thus he checked the Red Sea, and it obeyed his voice, Psal. 106:9. Its rapid motion quickly ceased, and the fluid waters were immediately ranged as defensive walls to secure the march of his people. At the command of God, the sea again recovered its wonted violence, and the watery walls came tumbling down upon the heads of the proud Egyptian oppressor and his host. The sea so exactly obeyed its orders, that not one Israelite was drowned, and not one Egyptian was saved alive. More particularly, the power of God appears in the moral government of the world.

(1.) In governing and ordering the hearts of men, so that they are not masters of their own affections, but often act quite contrary to what they had firmly resolved or proposed. Of which we have eminent instances in Esau and Balaam. He hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and can turn them what way he pleases. Thus he bent the hearts of the Egyptians to favour the Israelites, by sending them away with great riches given them by way of loan. He turned Jehoshaphat's enemies from him when they came with a purpose to destroy him, 2 Chron. 18:31.

(2.) In governing and managing the most stubborn creatures, as devils and wicked men. (1.) In his governing devils. They have great power, and are full of malice. The devil is always going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We could have no quiet nor safety in the world, if his power were not restrained, and his malice curbed by one that is mightier than the infernal fiend. He would turn all things upside down, plague the world, burn cities and houses, and plunder us of all the supports of life, if he were not held in a chain by the Omnipotent Governor of the world. But God overmasters his strength, so that he cannot move one hair's breadth beyond his tether. God has all the devils chained, and he governs all their motions. The devil could not touch Job in his person and goods without the divine permission; nor could he enter into the Gadarene swine without a special licence. If we consider the great malice of these invisible enemies, and the vast extent of their power, we will easily see that there could be no safety or security for men, if they were not curbed and restrained by a superior power. (2.) In governing wicked men. All the imaginations of their hearts are evil, and only evil continually. They are fully bent upon mischief, and drink iniquity like water. What unbridled licentiousness and headstrong fury would triumph in the world, and run with a rapid violence, if the Divine Power did not interpose to bear down the flood gates of it? Human society would be rooted up, the whole world drenched in blood, and all things would run into a sea of confusion, if God did not bridle and restrain the lusts and corruptions of men. The king of Assyria triumphed much in his design against Jerusalem; but how did God govern and manage that wild ass! Isa. 37:29. 'I will put my hook into thy nose, (says Jehovah), and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.' And we are told, Psal. 76:10 that 'the very wrath of man shall praise him, and that he will restrain the remainder of wrath.'

(3.) In raising up a church to himself in spite of all his enemies. This is specially seen in founding the New Testament church, and propagating the gospel through the world. The power of God appears admirable in planting the gospel, and converting the world to

Christianity. For there were many and great difficulties in the way, as gross and execrable idolatry; and the nations were strongly confirmed and rooted in their idolatry, being trained up and inured to it from their infant state. It was as hard to make the Gentiles forsake the religion which they received from their birth, as to make the Africans change their skin, and the leopard his spots. The Pagan religion was derived from their progenitors through a long succession of ages. Hence the heathens accused the Christian religion of novelty, and urged nothing more plausibly than the argument of immemorial prescription for their superstition. They would not consider whether it was just and reasonable, but with a blind deference yielded up themselves to the authority of the ancients. The pomp of the Pagan worship was very pleasing to the flesh; the magnificence of their temples, adorned with the trophies of superstition, their mysterious ceremonies, their music, their processions, their images and altars, their sacrifices and purifications, and the rest of the equipage of a carnal religion, drew their respects and strongly affected their minds through their senses. Whereas the religion of the gospel is spiritual and serious, holy and pure, and hath nothing to move the carnal part. There was then an universal depravation of manners among men; the whole earth was covered with abominations: the most unnatural lusts had lost the fear and shame that naturally attends them. We may see a melancholy picture of their most abandoned conversation, Rom. 1. The powers of the world were bent against the gospel. The heathen philosophers strongly opposed it. When Paul preached at Athens, the Epicureans and Stoics entertained him with scorn and derision; 'What will this babbler say?' said they. The heathen priests conspired to obstruct it. The princes of the world thought themselves obliged to prevent the introduction of a new religion, lest their empire should be in hazard, or the greatness and majesty of it impaired thereby. If we consider the means by which the gospel was propagated, the Divine Power will evidently appear. The persons employed in this great work were a few illiterate fishermen, with a publican and a tent-maker, without authority and power to force men to obedience, and without the charms of eloquence to enforce the belief of the

doctrines which they taught. Yet this doctrine prevailed, and the gospel had wonderful success through all the parts of the then known world, and that against all the power and policy of men and devils. Now, how could this possibly be, without a mighty operation of the power of God upon the hearts of men?

(4.) In preserving, defending, and supporting his church under the most terrible tempests of trouble and persecution which were raised against her. This is promised by our blessed Saviour, Matth. 16:18. 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' The most flourishing monarchies have decayed and wasted, and the strongest kingdoms have been broken in pieces; yet the church hath been preserved to this very day, notwithstanding all the subtle and potent enemies which in all ages have been pushing at her. Yea, God has preserved and delivered his church in the greatest extremities, when the danger in all human appearance was unavoidable; as in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in Esther's days, when a bloody decree was issued to slay all the Jews. Yea, God hath sometimes delivered his church by very weak and contemptible-like instruments, such as Moses, a fugitive from Egypt, and Aaron, a poor captive in it; and sometimes by very unlikely means, as when he smote Egypt with armies of locusts and lice. In all ages of the world God has gloriously displayed his power in the preservation of his church and people, notwithstanding all the rage, power, and malice of their enemies.

(5.) In the conversion of the elect. Hence the gospel, which is the means and instrument of conversion, is called the power of God, and the rod of his strength, and the day of the success of the gospel in turning sinners to Christ, is called the day of his power, Psal. 110:3. O what a mighty power must that be that stills the waves of a tempestuous sea, quells the lusts and stubbornness of the heart, demolishes the strong holds of sin in the soul, routs all the armies of corrupt nature, and makes the obstinate rebellious will strike sail to Christ! The power of God that is exerted here makes a man to think on other objects, and speak in another strain, than he did before. O how admirable is it, that carnal reason should be thus silenced; that

legions of devils should be thus driven out; and that men should part with those sins which before they esteemed their chiefest ornaments, and stand at defiance with all the charming allurements and bitter discouragements of the world? The same power that raised Christ from the grave is exerted in the conversion of a sinner. Eph. 1:19, 20. There is greater power exerted in this case than there was in the creation of the world. For when God made the world, he met with no opposition; he spake the word, and it was done: but when he comes to convert a sinner, he meets with all the opposition which the devil and a corrupt heart can make against him. God wrought but one miracle in the creation: he spake the word and it was done; but there are many miracles wrought in conversion. The blind is made to see, the dead raised, and the deaf hears the voice of the Son of God. O the infinite power of Jehovah! In this work the mighty arm of the Lord is revealed.

(6.) In preserving the souls of believers amidst the many dangers to which they are exposed, and bringing them safely to glory at last. They have many enemies without, a legion of subtle and powerful devils, and a wicked and ensnaring world, with all its allurements and temptations; and they have many strong lusts and corruptions within; and their graces are but weak, and in their infancy and minority, while they are here: So that it may justly be matter of wonder how they are preserved. But the apostle tells us, that they 'are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,' 1 Pet. 1:5. Indwelling corruption would soon quench grace in their hearts, if it were not kept alive by a divine power. But Christ hath pledged his faithfulness for it, that they shall be kept secure, John 10:28. It is his power that moderates the violence of temptations, supports his people under them, defeats the power of Satan, and bruises him under their feet.

4. Lastly, The power of God appears gloriously in the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ. Hence in scripture Christ is called the power as well as the wisdom of God. This is the most admirable Work that ever God brought forth in the world. More particularly,

(1.) The power of God shines in Christ's miraculous conception in the womb of a virgin. The power of the Highest did overshadow her, Luke 1:35 and by a creative act framed the humanity of Christ of the substance of the virgin's body, and united it to the Divinity. This was foretold many ages before as the effect of the divine power. When Judah was oppressed by two potent kings, and despaired of any escape and deliverance to raise their drooping spirits, the prophet tells them, that he would give them a sign; and a wonderful one it was. Therefore it is said 'Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,' Isa. 7:14. The argument is from the greater to the less: For if God will accomplish that stupendous and unheard-of wonder, much more will he rescue his people from the fury of their adversaries.

(2.) In uniting the divine and human nature in the person of Christ, and that without any confusion of the two natures, or changing the one into the other. The two natures of Christ are not mixed together, as liquors that incorporate with one another, when poured into the same vessel. The divine nature is not turned into the human, nor the human into the divine. One nature doth not swallow up another, and make a third distinct from both. But they are distinct, and yet united; conjoined, and yet unmixed: the properties of each nature are preserved entire. O what a wonder of power was here! that two natures, a divine and a human, infinitely distant in themselves, should meet together in a personal conjunction! Here one equal with God is found in the form of a servant; here God and man are united in one; the Creator and the creature are miraculously allied in the same subsistence. Here a God of unmixed blessedness is linked personally with a man of perpetual sorrows. That is an admirable expression, 'The Word was made flesh,' John 1:14. What can be more miraculous than for God to become man, and man to become God? that a person possessed of all the perfections and excellencies of the Deity should inherit all the infirmities and imperfections of humanity, sin only excepted? Was there not need of infinite power, to bring together terms which were so far asunder? Nothing less than

an omnipotent power could effect and bring about what an infinite and incomprehensible wisdom did project in this matter.

(3.) In supporting the human nature of Christ, and keeping it from sinking under the terrible weight of divine wrath that came upon him for our sins, and making him victorious over the devil and all the powers of darkness. His human nature could not possibly have borne up under the wrath of God and the curse of the law, nor held out under such fearful contests with the powers of hell and the world, if it had not been upheld by infinite power. Hence his Father says concerning him, Isa. 42:1. 'Behold my servant whom I uphold.'

(4.) The divine power did evidently appear in raising Christ from the dead. The apostle tells us, that God exerted his mighty power in Christ when he raised him from the dead, Eph. 1:19. The unlocking the belly of the whale for the deliverance of Jonah, the rescue of Daniel from the den of lions, and restraining the fire from burning the three children, were signal declarations of the divine power, and types of the resurrection of our Redeemer. But all these are nothing to what is represented by them: for that was a power over natural causes, and curbing of beasts and restraining of elements; but in the resurrection of Christ, God exercised a power over himself, and quenched the flames of his own wrath, that was hotter than millions of Nebuchadnezzar's furnaces: he unlocked the prison doors wherein the curses of the law had lodged our Saviour, stronger than the belly and ribs of a leviathan. How admirable was it, that he should be raised from under the curse of the law, and the infinite weight of our sins, and brought forth with success and glory after his sharp encounter with the powers of hell! in this the power of God was gloriously manifested. Hence he is said to be raised from the dead 'by the glory of the Father,' i. e. by his glorious power; and 'declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead,' Rom. 1:4. All the miraculous proofs by which God acknowledged him for his Son during his life, had been ineffectual without this. If he had remained in the grave, it had been reasonable to believe him only an ordinary person, and that his death had been the just

punishment of his presumption in calling himself the Son of God. But his resurrection from the dead was the most illustrious and convincing evidence, that really he was what he declared himself to be.

I shall conclude, on this point, with a few inferences.

1. God is omnipotent; that is, can do all things. It is true he cannot lie nor deny himself, for these are repugnant to his nature, and argue not power, but weakness and imperfection.

2. God's power never acts to its utmost extent. He can do more always than he either doth or will do, Matt. 3:9. He can do all things possible; but he only doth what he hath decreed to be done, Mat. 26:53, 54.

3. Hence we may be confirmed in our belief of the resurrection. Some are ready to reckon it a thing impossible, that there can be a recollection of the dispersed particles of men's bodies when they are dissolved into dust, and scattered into the four winds. But if we consider the power of God, this will abundantly answer all that can be objected against this truth. Hence saith the apostle, Acts 26:8. 'Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?' And saith our Saviour to the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, 'Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.' Almighty power can meet with no let or bar. Unless the particles of men's bodies could be scattered beyond the reach of Almighty power, and grinded so small as to escape the knowledge and care of God, this dispersion can make nothing against the faith and possibility of the resurrection.

4. Is God of infinite power? then all his promises shall be most certainly accomplished, whatever difficulties may be in the way thereof. For God is able to bring to pass whatever he has promised to his people. Therefore difficulty or improbability should never discourage or weaken our faith, because the power of God is infinite.

5. They are absolutely sure of salvation who are kept by the power of God; for God is able to keep them from falling, and his power is engaged for their preservation. They are surrounded with and infolded in the arms of Omnipotence; their souls are in safe custody, being committed unto Christ, from whose hands none can pluck them.

6. We to those against whom the power of God is set; for 'they shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, 2 Thess. 1:9. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Consider this, O ye sinners, and flee from the wrath that is to come.

7. Abuse not the power of God, by limiting it, as Israel did in the wilderness, Psal. 78:19 by trusting to an arm of flesh, as too many are apt to do, more than to the God of power, Jer. 17:5 or by fearing the wrath of man, who can only kill the body, and not dreading the displeasure of Almighty God, Isa. 51:12, 13.

8. Lastly, Improve the power of God by faith, depending upon it for the performance of all his gracious promises towards you and the church; for 'he can work, and who shall let it?' for strength to resist and vanquish, sin, Satan, and the world, saying, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?' and for grace to enable you to the performance of every commanded duty, saying with the apostle, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me.'

Fourthly, The next communicable attribute of God that falls to be considered is holiness, which is the absolute purity of his nature, whereby he delights in whatever is agreeable to his holy will, and in the resemblance of it that is in the creatures. Or, it is the perfect rectitude and integrity of the divine essence, whereby in all that he doth he acts like himself and for himself, delighting in whatever is agreeable to his will and nature, and abhorring whatever is contrary thereto. Hence he is said to be 'glorious in holiness,' Exod. 15:11. And 'he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon

iniquity,' Hab. 1:13. And he is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in holiness. Hence the heavenly host proclaim, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts,' Isa. 6:3.

Now, God is, (1.) Necessarily holy. Not only he will not, but he cannot look on iniquity. His holiness is not only an act of his will, but belongeth to his essence. (2.) He is essentially holy. Holiness is the essential glory of the divine nature; yea, it is his very essence. Holiness in men is an accessory quality and superadded gift, and is separable from the creature. But in God his essence and his holiness are the same. He could as soon cease to be God, as cease to be holy. (3.) He is perfectly holy. The best saints on earth are but holy in part; there is still a mixture of sin in them while here. But, 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all,' 1 John 1:5. (4.) He is universally holy; holy in all that he is, in all that he hath, and in all that he doth. He is holy in his name, in his nature, in his word, and in his works. (5.) He is originally holy. Angels and men are made holy; but God is holy of himself, and he is the original spring of all the holiness that is in the creatures (6.) He is exemplarily holy. The holiness of God is the example and pattern of all the holiness that is in the creatures. Hence we are required to 'be holy as God is holy,' 1 Pet. 1:16. (7.) He is perpetually and unchangeably holy. The best men on earth may change to the worse; they may grow less holy than they are; but God is immutable in his holiness. He cannot grow more holy than he is, because he is infinitely holy, and his holiness is incapable of any addition. Nor can he grow less holy than he is, because then he would cease to be God.

The holiness of God is manifested and discovered,

1. In his word; and that both in the precepts and promises thereof, God manifested his hatred and detestation of sin even in a variety of sacrifices under the ceremonial law; and the occasional washings and sprinklings upon ceremonial defilements, which polluted only the body, were a clear proof, that every thing that had a resemblance to evil was loathsome to God. All the legal sacrifices, washings, and

purifications, were designed to express what an evil sin is, and how hateful and abominable it is to him. But the holiness of God is most remarkably expressed in the moral law. Hence the law is said to be holy, Rom. 7:12. It is a true transcript of the holiness of God. And it is holy in its precepts. It requires an exact, perfect, and complete holiness in the whole man, in every faculty of the soul, and in every member of the body. It is holy in its prohibitions. It forbids and condemns all impurity and filthiness whatsoever. It discharges not only sinful words and actions, gross and atrocious crimes, and profane, blasphemous, and unprofitable speeches, but all sinful thoughts and irregular motions of the heart. Hence is that exhortation, Jer. 4:14. 'O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?' It is holy in its threatenings. All these have their fundamental root in the holiness of God, and are a branch of this essential perfection. All the terrible threatening annexed to the law are declarations of the holiness and purity of God, and of his infinite hatred and detestation of sin.

Again, the holiness of God appears in the promises of the word. They are called holy promises, Psal. 105:42 and they are designed to promote and encourage true holiness. Hence says the apostle, 2 Cor. 7:1. 'Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.' By them we are 'made partakers of a divine nature,' 2 Pet. 1:4.

2. The holiness of God is manifested in his works. Hence the Psalmist saith, 'The Lord is holy in all his works' Psal. 145:17. More particularly,

(1.) The divine holiness appears in the creation of man. Solomon tells us, Eccl. 7:29 that 'God made man upright;' and Moses says, that he was 'made after the image of God,' Gen. 1:27. Now, the image of God in man consists chiefly in holiness. Therefore the new man is said to be 'created after God in righteousness and true holiness,' Eph. 4:24. Adam was made with a perfection of grace. There was an entire and

universal rectitude in all its faculties, disposing them to their proper operations. There was no disorder among his affections, but a perfect agreement between the flesh and the spirit; and they both joined in the service of God. He fully obeyed the first and great command, of loving the Lord with all his soul and strength, and his love to other things was regulated by his love to God. When Adam dropt from the creating finger of God, he had knowledge in his understanding, sanctity in his will, and rectitude in his affections. There was such a harmony among all his faculties, that his members yielded to his affections, his affections to his will, his will obeyed his reason, and his reason was subject to the law of God. Here then was a display of the divine purity.

(2.) In the works of Providence; Particularly in his judicial proceedings against sinners for the violation of his holy and righteous laws. All the fearful judgments which have been poured down upon sinners, spring from God's holiness and hatred of sin. All the dreadful storms and tempests in the world are blown up by it. All diseases and sicknesses, wars, pestilence, plagues, and famines, are designed to vindicate God's holiness and hatred of sin. And therefore, when God had smitten the two sons of Aaron for offering strange fire, he says, 'I will be sanctified in them that draw nigh me, and before all the congregation I will be glorified,' Lev. 10:3. He glorified himself in declaring by that act, before all the people, that he is a holy God, that cannot endure sin and disobedience. More particularly,

[1.] God's holiness and hatred of sin is clearly manifested in his punishing the angels that sinned. It is said, 2 Pet. 2:4. 'God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.' Neither their mighty numbers, nor the nobility of their natures, could incline their offended Sovereign to spare them; they were immediately turned out of heaven, and expelled from the divine presence. Their case is hopeless and helpless; no mercy will ever be shewn to one of them, being under the blackness of darkness for ever.

[2.] In the punishment threatened and inflicted on man for his first apostasy from God. Man in his first state was the friend and favourite of heaven; by his extraction and descent he was the Son of God, a little lower than the angels; consecrated and crowned for the service of his Maker, and appointed as king over the inferior world; he was placed in paradise, the garden of God, and admitted to fellowship and communion with him. But sin hath divested him of all his dignity and glory. By his rebellion against his Creator, he made a forfeiture of his dominion, and so lost the obedience of the sensible creatures, and the service of the insensible. He was thrust out of paradise, banished from the presence of God, and debarred from fellowship and communion with him. God immediately sentenced him and all his posterity to misery, death, and ruin. This is a clear demonstration of the infinite purity and holiness of God. But blessed be God, for Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who hath restored that which the first Adam took away.

[3.] In executing terrible and strange judgments upon sinners. It was for sin that God drowned the old world with a deluge of water, rained hell out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and made the earth open her mouth, and swallow up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It was for sin that God brought terrible destroying judgments upon Jerusalem. All calamities and judgments spring from this bitter root, as sword, pestilence, distempers of body, perplexities of mind, poverty, reproach, and disgrace, and whatever is grievous and afflictive to men. All this shows how hateful sin is to God.

[4.] In punishing sins seemingly small with great and heavy judgments. A multitude of angels were sent down to hell for an aspiring thought, as some think. Uzzah, a good man, was struck dead in a moment for touching the ark; yea, fifty thousand Beth-shemites were smitten dead for looking into it. We are apt to entertain slight thoughts of many sins: but God hath set forth some as examples of his hatred and abhorrence of sins seemingly small, for a warning to others, and a testimony and demonstration of his exact holiness.

[5.] In bringing heavy afflictions on his own people for sin. Even the sins of believers in Christ do sometimes cost them very dear. He will not suffer them to pass without correction for their transgressions. Though they are exempted from everlasting torments in hell, yet they are not spared from the furnace of affliction here on earth. We have instances of this in David, Solomon, Jonah, and other saints. Yea, sometimes God in this life, punishes sin more severely in his own people than in other men. Moses was excluded from the land of Canaan but for speaking unadvisedly with his lips, though many greater sinners were suffered to enter in. Such severity towards his own people is a plain demonstration, that God hates sin as sin, and not because the worst men commit it.

[6.] In sentencing so many of Adam's posterity to everlasting torments for sin. That an infinitely good God, who is goodness itself, and delights in mercy, should adjudge so many of his own creatures to the everlasting pains and torments of hell, must proceed from his infinite holiness, on account of something infinitely detested and abhorred by him.

3. The holiness of God appears in our redemption by Jesus Christ. Here his love to holiness and his hatred of sin is most conspicuous. All the demonstrations that ever God gave of his hatred of sin were nothing in comparison of this. Neither all the vials of wrath and judgment which God hath poured out since the world began, nor the naming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the groans and roarings of the damned in hell, nor that irreversible sentence pronounced against the fallen angels, do afford such a demonstration of the divine holiness, and hatred of sin, as the death and sufferings of the blessed Redeemer. This will appear, if ye consider,

(1.) The great dignity and excellency of his person. He was the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Yet he must descend from the throne of his majesty, divest himself of his robes of insupportable light, take upon him the form of a servant, become a curse, and bleed

to death for sin. Did ever sin appear so hateful to God as here? To demonstrate God's infinite holiness, and hatred of sin, he would have the most glorious and most excellent person in heaven and earth to suffer for it. He would have his own Son to die on a disgraceful cross, and be exposed to the terrible flames of divine wrath, rather than sin should live, and his holiness remain for ever disparaged by the violations of his law.

(2.) How dear he was to his Father. He was his only begotten Son, he had not another; the only darling and the chief delight of his soul, who had lain in his bosom from all eternity. Yet as dear as he was to God, he would not and could not spare him, when he stood charged with his people's sins. For saith the apostle, Rom. 8:32. 'God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all.' As he spared him not in a way of free bounty, giving him freely as a ransom for their souls! so he spared him not in a way of vindictive justice, but exacted the utmost mite of satisfaction from him for their sins.

(3.) The greatness of his sufferings. Indeed the extremity of his sufferings cannot be expressed. Insensible nature, as if it had been capable of understanding and affection, was disordered in its whole frame at his death. The sun forsook his shining, and clothed the whole heavens in black; so that the air was dark at noon-day, as if it had been midnight. The earth shook and trembled, the rocks were rent asunder, and universal nature shrank. Christ suffered all that wrath which was due to the elect for their sins. His sufferings were equivalent to those of the damned. He suffered a punishment of loss: for all the comforting influences of the Spirit were suspended for a time. The divine nature kept back all its joys from the human nature of Christ, in the time of his greatest sufferings. We deserved to have been separated from God for ever; and therefore our Redeemer was deserted for a time. There was a suspension of all joy and comfort from his soul, when he needed it most. This was most afflicting and cutting to him, who had never seen a frown in his Father's face before. It made him cry out with a lamentable accent, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Again, he suffered a punishment

of sense, and that with respect to both his body and soul. The elect had forfeited both soul and body to divine vengeance; and therefore Christ suffered in both. The sufferings of his body were indeed terrible. It was filled with exquisite torture and pain. His hands and his feet, the most sensible parts were pierced with nails. His body was distended with such pains and torments as when all the parts are out of joint. Hence it is said of him, Psal. 22:14, 15. 'I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels, my strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me unto the dust of death.' Now, thus did the Son of God suffer. His pure and blessed hands, which were never stretched out but to do good, were pierced and rent asunder: and those feet which bore the Redeemer of the world, and for which the very waters had a reverence, were nailed to a tree. His body which was the precious workmanship of the Holy Ghost, and the temple of the Deity was destroyed. But his bodily sufferings were but the body of his sufferings. It was the sufferings of his soul that was the soul of his sufferings. No tongue can tell you what he endured here. When all the comforting influences of the Spirit were suspended, then an impetuous torrent of unmixed sorrows broke into his soul. O what agonies and conflicts, what sharp encounters, and distresses did he meet with from the wrath of God that was poured out upon him! He bore the wrath of an angry God, pure wrath without any alloy or mixture, and all that wrath which was due to the elect through all eternity for their innumerable sins. Sin was so hateful to God, that nothing could expiate it, or satisfy for it, but the death and bitter agonies of his dear Son.

(4.) Consider the cause of his sufferings. It was not for any sin of his own, for he had none, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. They were made his only by a voluntary susception, by taking his people's sins upon him. And though they were only imputed to him, yet God would not spare him. So that there is nothing wherein the divine holiness and hatred of sin is so manifest as in the sufferings of his own dear Son. This was a greater

demonstration thereof than if all men and angels had suffered for it eternally in hell-fire.

IT remains now to shut up this point with a few inferences.

1. Hence see the great evil of sin. It strikes against the divine holiness, which is the peculiar glory of the Deity; so that it is not only contrary to our own interest, but to the very nature of God. All sin aims in general at the being of God, but especially at the holiness of his being. There are some sins that strike more directly against one divine perfection, and some against another; but all sins agree together in their enmity against the holiness of God. Hence, when Sennacherib's sin is aggravated, the Holy Spirit takes the rise from this perfection, 2 Kings 19:22. 'Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel.' God cannot but hate that which is directly opposite to the glory of his nature, and the lustre and varnish of all his other perfections. Now, what an horrid evil must that be which is so contrary to the holy nature of God, and which is infinitely detested and abhorred by him?

2. Hence see the excellency of true gospel-holiness. Holiness is the glory and beauty of God, and the glory of the heavenly angels; and therefore it must be the glory of men and women, that which makes them truly glorious. In this respect the king's daughter is said to be all glorious within. The church is glorious, because she is holy. Hence Christ sanctifies and cleanses it, that he may present it to himself a glorious church, Eph. 5:25, 26. Holiness is the image of God in the rational creature. The more holy one is, the more like is he to God. This is our chief excellency. Man's original glory and happiness consisted in this; and the excellency of angels above devils lies in this. Holiness hath a self-evidencing excellency in it. There is such a beauty and majesty in it, as commands an acknowledgment of it from the consciences of all sorts of knowing men.

3. God can have no gracious communion with unholy sinners: 'For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?' 2 Cor. 6:14. It is simply impossible that an infinitely holy God should embrace vile polluted sinners that are not washed from their filthiness. They can have no fellowship with him here or hereafter. God will not give impure sinners one good look; for 'he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity,' Hab. 1:13. All communion is founded on union, and union upon likeness. But what likeness is there between a holy God and vile polluted creatures? Therefore they can never expect to have any communion with him, unless they be made clean. Hence they are directed to this, in order to their communion with God, Jam. 4:8. 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.' 2 Cor. 6:17, 18. 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

4. The best of saints, who have attained the highest degrees, and made the greatest improvements in holiness and purity, may be ashamed in the presence of an infinitely holy God; for they are far short of that holiness which God requires, and all the purity they have attained is sadly tinged with impurity. It had this effect upon the evangelical prophet, when he had a vision of the holy God. Isa. 6:5. 'Wo is me,' says he, 'for I am undone, because I am of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.'

5. Despisers of holiness are despisers of God. For holiness is the glory of God, and that in which he delights above all things. For men, therefore, to despise holiness in the saints, and to make a mock of their holy lives and practices, is a high contempt of the holy God, who will highly resent such a great indignity done him.

6. There is no access to God without a Mediator. 'For our God is a consuming fire,' Heb. 12:29, and our sin hath made us as stubble fully dry. He is infinitely pure and holy, and we are vile filthy creatures; so that it is quite impossible for us to have any access to him, or communion with him, on our own account. We have all reason to cry out, as 1 Sam. 6:20. 'Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?' There is no standing before him without a Mediator. The spots and blemishes of our best duties cannot be hid from the eyes of his holiness. He cannot accept of a righteousness lower than that which bears some suitableness to the holiness of his nature: but even our highest obedience and best righteousness does not in any degree suit the divine holiness: and therefore it cannot challenge any acceptance with God. The righteousness of Christ, being the righteousness of God, a perfect and unspotted righteousness, is that wherein alone the holiness of God can acquiesce, and is the foundation of all access to God, and communion with him.

7. Is God infinitely and necessarily holy, so that he cannot but hate sin? then how admirable is the patience of God towards this land, and the generation wherein we live? How much sin and wickedness abounds amongst us? Alas! all kinds of sin wofully prevail at this day among all ranks and degrees of persons, high and low, rich and poor, noble and ignoble; all have corrupted their way. Sins of a heinous nature are to be found among us, such as bid God defiance; horrid blasphemies, hideous oaths, vile adulteries, cruel oppressions, contempt of religion, and gross profanation of the Lord's day. Add to all these, ingratitude, worldliness, pride, and self-conceit among such as are more eminent for a profession of religion. All these are committed under a clear gospel-light, after signal mercies and deliverances, against the most solemn covenant engagements, personal and national, and against manifold rebukes and warnings from the word and providence of God. And alas! how are these sins increased and multiplied? Who can compute the number of the sins which one profane wretch is guilty of? But what are these to the sins of a whole city? and what are the sins of a whole city to the sins of the whole nation? Who can compute the number of the sins which

Scotland is guilty of in one day? But what are these to the sins which have been committed for a great many years past? Ah! we are a people deeply laden with iniquity. O what matter of admiration is here, that God bears so long with us! His holiness and purity renders his patience the more astonishing. O the riches of his forbearance towards us! Admire it and adore it, and praise and bless him for it; and beware of abusing it, by taking liberty to go on in sin, because of it. Such an amazing patience, if abused, will render our judgment the more severe.

8. Lastly, Be exhorted to make a suitable improvement of the holiness of God, by fleeing to Jesus Christ, whose perfect righteousness alone can make you acceptable to God, and whose Spirit can sanctify and cleanse you; by giving thanks at the remembrance of the divine holiness, by proclaiming the glory thereof; and by studying holiness in all manner of life and conversation.

Fifthly, The next communicable attribute of God that falls under our consideration is his justice, which is the perfect rectitude of his nature, whereby he is infinitely righteous and equal, both in himself, and in all his dealings with his creatures, Deut. 32:4. 'Just and right is he.' God is just to himself in acting in all things agreeable to his nature and perfections. All his actions are such as become such a pure and holy being as he is. He cannot do any thing that is contrary to the perfection of his nature: he cannot lie nor deny himself. He is just to himself in maintaining his own glory, and his divine rights and prerogatives; for he will not give his glory to another. And he is just towards his creatures in all his dealings with them, particularly with man. Here God may be considered, 1. As a sovereign Lord; and, 2. As supreme governor and Judge of the world.

(1.) As sovereign Lord. And so he hath a right to do with his own what he will. He may order and dispose of all the creatures according to his pleasure, Dan. 4:35. We are all in his hand as clay in the hand of the potter. He hath a sovereign and absolute right to use and

dispose of us according to his own pleasure, to set bounds to our habitation, carve out our lot in the world, and set us high or low, in prosperity or adversity, as he pleaseth. It is so also, as to his dispensations of grace. He may give grace to whom he will, and withhold it from whom he will; and what he wills in that matter is just and right, because he wills it.

(2.) As supreme Governor and Judge of the world. And so he is just in governing his rational creatures in a way agreeable to their nature, according to a law which he has given them. His justice in this character is either legislative or executive.

(1.) There is a legislative justice, which is that whereby he gives most just and righteous laws to his creatures, commanding and forbidding what is fit for them in right reason to do and forbear. 'For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our king, the Lord is our lawgiver,' Isa. 33:22. Man being a reasonable creature, capable of moral government, therefore, that God might rule him according to his nature, he hath given him a law, confirmed by promises of reward, to draw him by hope, and by threatenings of punishment to deter him by fear. Hence Moses tells the Israelites, that he had 'set before them life and good, and death and evil' Deut. 30:15 and that he had 'set before them life and death, blessing and cursing,' ver. 19.

(2.) There is God's executive justice, called also by some his judicial justice, by others his distributive justice. In this respect he is just in giving every one his due, and in rendering unto all men according to their works, without respect of persons. This executive justice of God is either remunerative or afflictive.

(1.) There is a remunerative or rewarding justice. God is just in rewarding the righteous. Psal. 58:11. 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous.' The saints shall not serve him for nought. Though they may be losers for him, yet they shall not be losers by him, Heb. 6:10. 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.' He bountifully rewards his people's obedience, and their diligence and

faithfulness in his service. Hence David says, Psal. 18:20. 'The Lord rewardeth me according to my righteousness.' Sometimes he rewards them with temporal blessings: for godliness hath the promise of this life, as well as that which is to come. Sometimes Providence doth notably interpose, and load obedience with blessings here in the world, to the conviction of all beholders, so that men are constrained to say, 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous.' But however he do as to outward things, yet he rewards his people with inward blessings. There are fresh supplies and influences of grace, near and intimate communion with him, sweet manifestations of his favour and love, intimations of peace and pardon, and joy and peace in believing, &c. Even 'in keeping his commandments there is great reward,' Psal. 19:11. And he rewards them with eternal blessings, 2 Thess. 1:7. Now, this reward is not of debt but of grace. It doth not imply any merit, but is free and gratuitous. It is not because they deserve it, but because Christ has merited it, and God has graciously promised it.

(2.) There is an afflictive justice. God is just in all the afflictions and troubles which he brings upon his creatures; because he always punishes sinners by a law. The violations of his holy and righteous laws make them obnoxious to his judgments. Sometimes God sends afflictions upon people to chastise and correct them for their sins. Now, all the troubles of believers are of this kind: for as many as he loves, he rebukes and chastens. Some of their afflictions are intended to reduce them from their strayings. Hence says David, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray,' and, 'It was good for me that I was afflicted.' Indeed God chuseth some in the furnace of affliction. The hot furnace is God's work-house wherein he sometimes formeth vessels of honour. Manasseh is an eminent instance of this. Many that were never serious before, are brought to consider their ways in their affliction. Sometimes God takes vengeance on wicked men for their sins and disobedience to his laws: and this is called vindictive justice, Rom. 3:5, 6 which is essential to the nature of God, and is not merely an effect of his will. He cannot let sin go unpunished. He not only

will not, but he cannot acquit the wicked. But more of this afterwards.

The justice of God is manifested and discovered,

1. In the temporal judgments which he brings upon sinners even in this life. The saints own this, Neh. 9:33. 'Thou art just in all that is brought upon us.' The end and design of all God's judgments is to witness to the world, that he is a just and righteous God. All the fearful plagues and terrible judgments which God has brought upon the world, proclaim and manifest his justice.

2. In sentencing so many of Adam's posterity to everlasting pains and torments for sin, according to that dreadful sentence which shall be pronounced at the last day, Matth. 25:41. 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' If you could descend into the bottomless pit, and view the pains and torments of hell, and hear the terrible shrieks and roarings of the damned wallowing in these sulphureous flames, you could not shun to cry out, O the severity of divine justice! Though they are the works of God's own hands, and roar and cry under their torments, yet they cannot obtain any mitigation of their pains, nay, not so much as one drop of water to cool their tongues. That an infinitely good and gracious God, that delights in mercy, should thus torment so many of his own creatures, O how incorruptible must his justice be!

3. In the death and sufferings of Christ. God gave his beloved Son to the death for this end, that it might be known what a just and righteous God he is. So the apostle shews us, Rom. 3:25. 'Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness,' &c. He set him forth in garments rolled in blood, to declare his justice and righteousness to the world. After man turned rebel, and apostatised from God, there was no way to keep up the credit and honour of divine justice, but either a strict execution of the law's sentence, or a full satisfaction. The execution would have destroyed the whole race of Adam. Therefore Christ

stepped in, and made a sufficient satisfaction by his death and sufferings, that so God might exercise his mercy without prejudice to his justice. Thus the blood of the Son of God must be shed for sin, to let the world see that he is a just and righteous God. The justice of God could and would be satisfied with no less. Hence it is said, Rom. 8:32. 'God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the death for us all.' If forbearance might have been expected from any, surely it might from God, who is full of pity and tender mercy: yet God in this case spared him not. If one might have expected sparing mercy and abatement from any, surely Christ might most of all expect it from his own Father; yet God spared not his own Son. Sparing mercy is the lowest degree of mercy; yet it was denied to Christ, when he stood in the room of the elect. God abated him not a minute of the time appointed for his sufferings, nor one degree of the wrath which he was to bear. Nay, though in the garden, when Christ fell on the ground, and put up that lamentable and pitiful cry, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;' yet no abatement was granted to him. The Father of mercies saw his dear Son humbled in his presence, and yet dealt with him in extreme severity. The sword of justice was in a manner asleep before, in all the terrible judgments which had been executed on the world, but now it must be awakened and roused up to pierce the heart of the blessed Redeemer. Hence it is said, Zech. 13:7. 'Awake O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd.' If divine justice had descended from heaven in a visible form, and hanged up millions of sinners in chains of wrath, it had not been such a demonstration of the wrath of God, and his hatred of sin, as the death and sufferings of his own Son. When we hear that God exposed his own Son to the utmost severity of wrath and vengeance, may we not justly cry out O the infinite evil of sin! O the inflexible severity of divine justice! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

4. The justice of God will be clearly manifested at the great day. God hath reared up many trophies already to the honour of his power and justice out of the ruins of his most insolent enemies: but then will be

the most solemn triumph of divine justice. The apostle tells us, Acts 17:31 that 'he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.' On that awful day the justice and righteousness of God shall be clearly revealed, therefore it is called 'the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God,' Rom. 2:5. The equity of God's dealings and dispensations is not now so fully seen: but all will be open and manifest on that day. Then he will liberally reward the righteous, and severely punish the wicked.

5. God's justice will shine for ever in the torments of the damned in hell. The smoke of their furnace, their yellings and roarings, will proclaim through eternity the inexorable justice and severity of God. It is not enough for the satisfaction of his justice to deprive them of heaven and happiness; but he will inflict the most tormenting punishment upon sense and conscience in hell. For as both soul and body were guilty in this life, the one as the guide, the other as the instrument of sin, so it is but just and equal that they should both feel the penal effects of it hereafter. Sinners shall then be tormented in that wherein they most delighted: they shall then be invested with those objects which will cause the most dolorous perceptions in their sensitive faculties. The lake of fire and brimstone, the blackness of darkness, for ever, are words of a terrible signification. But no words can fully express the terrible ingredients of their misery. Their punishment will be in proportion to the glory of God's majesty that is provoked, and the extent of his power. And as the soul was the principal, and the body but an accessory in the works of sin; so its capacious faculties shall be far more tormented than the limited faculties of the outward senses. The fiery attributes of God shall be transmitted through the glass of conscience, and centred upon damned spirits. The fire without will not be so tormenting as the fire within them. Then all the tormenting passions will be inflamed. What rancour, reluctance, and rage, will there be against the just power that sentenced them to hell! what impatience and indignation against themselves for their wilful and inexcusable sins, the just

cause of it! how will they curse their creation, and wish their utter extinction as the final remedy of their misery! But all their ardent wishes will be in vain. For the guilt of sin will never be expiated, nor God so far reconciled as to annihilate them. As long as there is justice in heaven, or fire in hell, as long as God and eternity shall continue, they must suffer those torments which the strength and patience of an angel cannot bear one hour. The justice of God will blaze forth for ever in the agonies and torments of the damned.

It may not be improper here to take notice of, and answer some objections that are made against the divine justice.

Object. 1. If God be infinitely just and righteous, how stands it with his justice that insolent contemners of his majesty and laws should prosper in the world? This was observed by the saints long ago; see Psal. 73:5, 6, 7, 12; and has proved a stumbling-block to some of God's own children, and has seen apt to make them question his justice; see Job 21:7–14. Jer. 12:1, 2. But in answer, consider,

1. That the wicked may be sometimes instruments to do God's work. Though they do not design and intend his glory, yet they may be instrumental in promoting it. Thus Cyrus was instrumental for the building of God's temple at Jerusalem. Now there is some kind of justice in it that such persons should have a temporal reward. God is pleased to suffer those to prosper under whose wings his own people are sheltered. He will not be in any man's debt. Nebuchadnezzar did some service for God, and the Lord rewarded him for it by granting him an enlargement of greatness, Ezek. 29:18, 19, 20.

2. God doth not always let the wicked prosper in their sin. There are some whom he punisheth openly, that his justice may be observed by all. Hence the Psalmist saith, 'The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands,' Psal. 9:16. Sometimes their prosperity is but short lived, and they are suddenly cast down, as the Psalmist remarks, Psal. 73:18, 19, 20. His justice is Been striking men dead sometimes in the

very act of sin; as in the case of Zimri and Cozbi, Pharaoh, Sennacherib, &c.

3. God suffers men to go on in sin and prosper, that he may render them the more inexcusable. This goodness and forbearance should lead them to repentance; and when it does not, it aggravates their sin, and makes them the more inexcusable, when he comes to reckon with them. Hence it is said of Jezebel, 'I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not,' Rev. 2:21. God spins out his mercies toward sinners; and if they do not repent and amend, his patience will be a witness against them, and his justice will be more cleared in their condemnation.

4. If God let the wicked prosper for a while, the vial of his wrath is all that while filling up, his sword is whetting and though he forbear them for a time, yet long-suffering is not forgiveness. The longer it be ere he give the blow, it will be the heavier when it comes. The last scene of justice is coming, when the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. There is a day of wrath approaching, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Then he will glorify his justice in taking vengeance on them for all their sins. God hath an eternity in which he will punish the wicked. Divine justice may be as a lion asleep for a time: but at last this lion will awake, and roar upon the sinner. Their long continued prosperity will heighten their eternal condemnation. There are many sinners in hell who lived in great pomp and prosperity in the world, and are now roaring under the terrible lashes of inexorable justice. Thus ye may see that the prosperity of the wicked is consistent enough with the justice of God.

Object. 2. God's own people oft-times suffer great afflictions in the world; they are persecuted and oppressed, and meet with a variety of troubles, Psal. 73:14. How stands this with the justice of God?

Ans. 1. The ways of God's judgments, though they are sometimes secret, yet they are never unjust. God doth not afflict willingly, nor

grieve the children of men. There are culpable causes in them from which their afflictions spring. They have their spots and blemishes as well as others. Though they may be free from gross and atrocious crimes, yet they are guilty of much pride and passion, censoriousness, worldliness, &c. And the sins of God's people are more provoking in his sight than the sins of other men. And God will not suffer them to pass without correction, Amos 3:2. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.' This justifies God in all the evils that befall them.

2. All the trials and sufferings of the godly are designed to refine and purify them, to promote their spiritual and eternal good, Heb. 12:10. Nothing proclaims God's faithfulness more than his taking such a course with them as may make them better. Hence says David, Psal. 119:75. 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.' Though they are sometimes pinched with wants, and meet with various outward troubles, yet even these are the accomplishments of a gracious promise, and are ordered for their good. It is to chastise them for their sin, and quicken them to repentance and mortification, to try and exercise their faith and patience, their sincerity and love to God, to wean their hearts from the world, and to promote their growth in grace.

3. It is no injustice in God to inflict a lesser punishment to prevent a greater. The best of God's children have that in them which is meritorious of hell; and doth God any wrong to them when he useth only the rod, when they deserved the scorpion? An earthly parent will not be reckoned cruel or unjust, if he only correct his children who deserved to be disinherited. When God corrects his children, he only puts wormwood into their cup, whereas he might fill it up with fire and brimstone. Under the greatest pressure, they have just cause rather to admire his mercy, than to complain of his justice. So did the afflicted church, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed.'

Object. 3. If God be infinitely just, how could he transfer the punishment from the guilty? This is the objection of the Socinians against Christ's suffering for the sins of the elect. It is a violation of justice, say they, to transfer the punishment from one to another. How then could the righteous God punish his innocent Son for our sins?

I answer to this in general, That in some cases it is not unjust to punish the innocent for the guilty. For though an innocent person cannot suffer as innocent without injustice, yet he may voluntarily contract an obligation which will expose him to deserved sufferings. The innocent may suffer for the guilty, when he has power to dispose of his own life, and puts himself freely and voluntarily under an obligation to suffer, and is admitted to suffer by him who has power to punish, and when no detriment, but rather an advantage, accrues to the public thereby. In these circumstances, justice hath nothing to say against the punishing of an innocent person in the room of the guilty. Now, there is a concurrence of all these in the case in hand. For,

1. Christ had absolute power to dispose of himself. One reason why a man is not allowed to lay down his life for another is, because his life is not at his own disposal. But Christ was absolute lord of his own life, and had power to keep it or lay it down as he pleased. So he declares, John 10:18. 'No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.'

2. He freely consented to suffer for his people, and to undergo the punishment that they deserved. To compel an innocent person to suffer for the offences of another, may be an injury. But in this case there was no constraint: for Christ most willingly offered himself: yea, he was not only willing, but most earnest and desirous to suffer and die in our room, Luke 12:50. 'I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?'

3. The Father admitted him as our Surety, and was well content that his sufferings should stand for ours, and that we thereupon should be absolved and discharged. It was the Father's will that Christ should undertake this work. Hence it is said, Psal. 40:8. 'I delight to do thy will, O my God.' And the Father loved Christ, because he so cheerfully consented to it, John 10:17. 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.'

4. There was no detriment to the public by Christ's death; but, on the contrary, many advantages redounded to it thereby. One reason why an innocent man cannot suffer for a malefactor is, because the community would lose a good man, and might suffer by the sparing of an ill member, and the innocent sufferer cannot have his life restored again being once lost. But in this case all things are quite otherwise: for Christ laid down his life, but so as to take it up again. He rose again on the third day, and death was swallowed up of victory. And those for whom he suffered were reclaimed, effectually changed, and made serviceable to God and man. So that here there was no injury done to any party by Christ's sufferings, though an innocent person. Not to them for whom he died; for they have inexpressible benefit thereby: he is made to them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Not to the person suffering: for he was perfectly willing, and suffered nothing without his own consent. Not to God: for he himself found out the ransom, and admitted Christ as our Surety. Not to any thing concerned in the government of God: for by the death of Christ all the ends of God's government were secured. His honour was hereby vindicated, the authority of his law preserved, and his subjects, by such an instance of severity on his own Son, were deterred from violating it. So that there is no injustice to any in God's punishing Christ in his people's stead.

Object. 4. How is it consistent with the justice of God to punish temporary sins with eternal torments in hell? Some think it hard, and scarcely consistent with infinite justice, to inflict eternal

punishment for sins committed in a little time. But to clear the justice of God in this, consider,

1. That eternal punishment is agreeable to the sanction of the law. The wisdom of God required, that the penalty threatened upon the transgressor should be in its own nature so dreadful and terrible, that the fear of it might conquer and over-rule all the allurements and temptations to sin. If it had not been so, it would have reflected upon the wisdom of the Lawgiver, as if he had been defective, in not binding his subjects firmly enough to their duty, and the ends of government would not have been obtained. And therefore the first and second death was threatened to Adam in case of disobedience. And fear, as a watchful sentinel, was placed in his breast, that no guilty thought or irregular desire should enter in to break the tables of the law deposited there. So that eternal death is due to sinners by the sanction of the law.

2. The righteousness of God in punishing the wicked for ever in hell will appear, if ye consider that God by his infallible promise assures us, that all who sincerely serve and obey him shall be rewarded with everlasting happiness. They shall receive a blessedness most worthy of God to bestow, a blessedness that far surmounts our most comprehensive thoughts and imaginations. For eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love him. Now, if everlasting felicity be despised and rejected, nothing remains but endless misery to be the sinner's portion. The consequence is infallible: For if sin, with an eternal hell in its retinue be chosen and embraced, it is most just and equal that the rational creature should inherit the fruit of its own choice. What can be more just and reasonable, than that those who are the slaves of the devil, and maintain his party here in the world, should have their recompense with him for ever hereafter? Nothing can be more just, than that those who now say to the Almighty, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways, should receive that dreadful sentence at last, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.

3. The punishment of the damned must be eternal, because of the immense guilt and infinite evil of sin. It is owned by common reason, that there ought to be a proportion between the quality of the offence and the degree of the punishment. Justice takes the scales into its hand before it takes the sword. It is a rule in all sorts of judicature, that the degrees of an offence arise according to the degrees of dignity in the person offended. Now, the majesty of God is truly infinite, against whom sin is committed; and consequently the guilt of sin exceeds our boundless thoughts. One act of sin is rebellion against God, and includes in it the contempt of his majesty, the contradiction of his holiness, which is his peculiar glory, the denial of his omniscience and omnipresence, as if he were confined to the heavens, and busied in regulating the harmonious order of the stars, and did not observe what is done here below. And there is in it a defiance of his eternal power, and a provoking him to jealousy, as if we were stronger than he. O, what a dishonour is it to the God of glory, that proud dust should flee in his face, and controul his authority! What a horrid provocation is it to the Most High, that the reasonable creature, that is naturally and necessarily a subject, should despise the divine law and Lawgiver? From this it appears that sin is an infinite evil. There is in it a concurrence of impiety, ingratitude, perfidiousness, and whatever may enhance a crime to an excess of wickedness. Now, sin being an infinite evil, the punishment of it must also be infinite; and because a creature is not able to bear a punishment infinite in degree, by reason of its finite and limited nature, therefore it must be infinite in its duration. And for this cause the punishment of the damned shall never have an end. The almighty power of God will continue them in their being, but they will curse and blaspheme that support, which shall be given them only to perpetuate their torments; and ten thousand times wish that God would destroy them once for all, and that they might for ever shrink away into nothing. But that will never be granted to them. No; they shall not have so much as the comfort of dying, nor shall they escape the vengeance of God by annihilation.

4. Their punishment must be eternal: for they will remain for ever unqualified for the least favour. The damned are not changed in hell, but continue their hatred and blasphemies against God. The seeds of this are in obstinate sinners here in the world, who are styled haters of God: but in the damned this hatred is direct and explicit; the fever is heightened into a phrenzy. The glorious and ever-blessed God is the object of their curses and eternal aversion. Our Lord tells us, that in hell there is weeping and gnashing of teeth,' i. e. extreme sorrow and extreme fury. Despair and rage are the proper passions of lost souls. For when the guilty sufferers are so weak, that they cannot by patience endure their torments, nor by strength resist the power that inflicts them, and withal are wicked and stubborn, they are enraged and irritated by their misery, and foam out blasphemies against the righteous Judge. We may apply to this purpose what is said of the worshippers of the beast, Rev. 16:10, 11. 'They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.' The torment and blasphemies of these impenitent idolaters are a true representation of the state of the damned. Now, as they will always sin; so they must always suffer. On these accounts, then, it is agreeable to the wisdom and justice of God that their pains and torments be eternal.

But now it is time to shut up this point with a few inferences.

1. It is inconsistent with the nature of God to let sin go unpunished; or, vindictive justice is essential to God. To clear this, consider,

(1.) This is evident from the light of nature. For that God is just, is strongly and deeply stamped upon the minds of the children of men. Hence, when the barbarians saw the viper fasten upon Paul's hand, they cried out that vengeance pursued him as a murderer, Acts 28:4. The very instinct of nature told them, that there was a connection between guilt and punishment. To deny God to be just, is to offer violence to the principles of nature, to put a lie upon those notions which are born with and impressed upon our reason. It is to condemn conscience as a cheat, and all the terrors thereof as a false

alarm. In a word, it is to eradicate all religion, and to open a flood-gate to all wickedness and impiety.

(2.) This appears from scripture assertions and examples. [1.] Consider scripture examples and declarations, such as Rev. 16:5. 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged, Rom. 2:5. —'The righteous judgment of God' 2 Thess. 1:6. 'It is a righteous thing with God to recompence with tribulation,' Heb. 2:2. 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward,' Heb. 12:29. 'Our God is a consuming fire,' Rom. 1:32. 'Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death.' Compare Gen. 18:25. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' [2.] Think upon scripture-examples, with respect to this matter. The angels, the flower and glory of the creation, the first-born of intelligent beings, when they revolted from their Maker, were doomed and cast into hell, where they lie reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the last day. Our first parents, and in them all their posterity, because of their apostasy, were sentenced to death and misery. The old world, except eight persons, were swept off the face of the earth, by a devouring deluge, on account of their impiety. Sodom and Gomorrah were by fire from heaven consumed to ashes, because of their vile uncleanness. The Egyptians sunk under multiplied plagues, because they hardened themselves against the Lord, and would not let Israel go. Yea, the Israelites themselves met with many severe judgments in the wilderness, in Canaan, and in Babylon, because they rebelled against the Lord their God. In a word, this people at last, for murdering the Messiah, and rejecting the gospel, were destroyed with a great destruction at the siege of Jerusalem, where eleven thousand perished by sword, famine, and pestilence, and very near a hundred thousand more were carried away captive.

(3.) This appears from the nature of God, which carries in it the utmost detestation of sin; and this necessarily produces punishment. 'Upon the wicked God will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest,' Psal. 11:6. Now the reason of all this holy severity

is given in the very next verse, 'For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.' His holy nature prompts him to love righteousness, and consequently to hate and punish all unrighteousness.

(4.) It is evident from the nature of sin. What is sin but the offering of the highest indignity to the infinite and Supreme Being, the Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor of mankind? It is an affronting of all his perfections, a reflection upon his wisdom, a contempt of his power, an insult to his holiness, a disparagement of his goodness, and an open defiance to his truth and faithfulness. If then sin be such an evil, an evil infinitely worse than we are capable to represent it, how can any imagine that God will forbear or neglect to punish such who obstinately live and die in the practice of it?

(5.) This will appear, if ye consider God as a Governor and Lawgiver. For his authority as such can never be preserved and maintained, if there be an universal impunity of criminal offences. Rebellion against Heaven would spread far and wide, devils and wicked men would grow absolutely unruly, the Divine Majesty and dominion would become contemptible, and his glorious sovereignty would be rendered vile and despicable, if bold offenders were not severely checked and punished for their enormities.

(6.) Consider, that if vindictive justice be not essential to God, it will be very hard, if not impossible, to give any tolerable account of the death and sufferings of Christ.

1. Is God infinitely just? Then there is a judgment to come. The justice of God requires that men should reap according to what they have sown; that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. But it is not apparently so now in this present world. Here things are out of course; sin is rampant, and runs with a rapid violence. Many times the most guilty sinners are not punished in the present life; they not only escape the justice of men, but are under no conspicuous marks of the justice of God. As sinners prosper and flourish, so saints are wronged and oppressed. They are often cast in

a right cause, and can meet with no justice on the earth; yea, the best men are often in the worst condition, and merely upon account of their goodness. They are borne down and oppressed, because they do not make resistance; and are loaded with sufferings many times, because they bear them with patience. And the reason of these dispensations is, because now is the time of God's patience and of our trial. Therefore there must be a day wherein the justice of God shall be made manifest. Then he will set all things right. He will crown the righteous, and condemn the wicked. Then God shall have the glory of his justice, and his righteousness shall be openly vindicated. At the last day God's sword shall be drawn against offenders, and his justice shall be revealed before all the world. At that day all mouths shall be stopped, and God's justice shall be fully vindicated from all the cavils and clamours of unjust men.

2. This lets us see how unlike to God many men are. Some have no justice at all. Though their place and office oblige them to it, they neither fear God nor regard man. Many times they pervert justice, they decree unrighteous decrees, Isa. 10:1. Many are unjust in their dealings; they trick, cheat, and defraud their neighbours; sometimes in using false weights, the balances of deceit are in their hands, Hos. 12:7. Some hold the Bible in one hand, and false weights in the other; they cozen, defraud, and cheat, under a specious profession of religion. Some adulterate their commodities; their wine is mixed with water, Isa. 1:22. They mix bad grain with good, and yet sell it for pure grain. There are many ways by which men deceive and impose upon their neighbours. All which shew what a rare commodity justice is among them. But remember this is very unlike God. For he is the just and right one; he is righteous in all his ways. That man cannot possibly be godly who is not just. We are commanded to imitate him in all his imitable perfections. Though he doth not bid you be omnipotent, yet you ought to be just.

3. Is God infinitely just? Then we must not expostulate with or demand a reason of his actions. He hath not only authority on his side, but justice and equity. In all his dispensations towards men,

however afflictive they be, he is just and righteous. He layeth judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, Isa. 28:17. It is below him to give an account to us of any of his proceedings. The plumb-line of our reason is too short to fathom the great depths of God's justice: for his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out, Rom. 11:33. We are to, adore his justice, where we cannot see the reason of it. God's justice hath often been wronged, but never did wrong to any. How unreasonable, then, is it for men to expostulate with and dispute against God?

4. Is God infinitely just? Then the salvation of sinners who have believed in Christ is most secure, and they need not doubt of pardon and acceptance. 'God is faithful and just to forgive them their sins,' 1 John 1:9. God hath promised it, and he will not break his word; yea, he stands bound in justice to do it; for Christ hath satisfied his justice for all your sins who are believers, so that it hath nothing to crave of you. It doth not stand with the justice of God to exact the same debt from you. Your Redeemer did not only satisfy justice, but also merited the exercise of it on your behalf. Hence it is that God is bound in justice to justify you upon your believing on Christ; for he is just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus, Rom. 3:26. So that the thoughts even of divine justice, which are terrible to others, may be comfortable to believers.

5. Is God infinitely just? Then the destruction of wicked and impenitent sinners is infallibly certain. For the just God will by no means acquit the guilty. His justice, which is essential to him, cannot but take vengeance on you.

6. Lastly, However severely the Lord deals with us, he neither doth nor can do us any wrong; and therefore we should lay our hand on our mouth, Lam. 3:39. 'Why doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?'

Sixthly, The goodness of God is the next communicable attribute that falls to be considered. The divine goodness is that essential property

whereby he is altogether good in himself, and the author of all good to his creatures: Thou art good, and dost good, says the Psalmist, Ps. 119:68. There is a twofold goodness of God; his absolute and his relative goodness.

1. There is an absolute goodness of God. This is that whereby he is conceived to be good in himself, without any relation to his creatures. God is thus good because his nature is infinitely perfect.

2. There is his relative goodness, by which we are to understand his bounty and benignity. As all fulness dwells in him, so he hath a strong inclination to let it out to his people on all occasions. The whole earth is full of his goodness, Psal. 33:5.

The goodness of God is manifested,

1. In creation. There is no other perfection of the divine nature so eminently visible in the whole book of the creatures as this is. His goodness was the cause that he made any thing, and his wisdom was the cause that he made every thing in order and harmony. Here the goodness of God shines with a glorious lustre. All the varieties of the creatures which he hath made are so many beams and apparitions of his goodness. It was great goodness to communicate being to some things without himself, and to extract such a multitude of things from the depths of nothing, and to give life and breath to some of these creatures. Divine goodness formed their natures, beautified and adorned them with their several ornaments and perfections, whereby every thing was enabled to act for the good of the common world. Every creature hath a character of divine goodness upon it. The whole world is a map to represent, and a herald to proclaim, this amiable perfection of God. But the goodness of God is manifested especially in the creation of man. He raised him from the dust by his almighty power, and placed him in a more sublime condition, and endued him with choicer prerogatives, than the rest of the creatures. What is man's soul and body but like a cabinet curiously carved, with a rich and precious gem inclosed in it! God hath made him an

abridgment of the whole creation: the links of the two worlds, heaven and earth, are united in him. He communicates with the earth in the dust of his body, and he participates with the heavens in the crystal of his soul. He has the life of angels in his reason, and that of animals in his sense. Further, the divine goodness is manifested in making man after his image, in furnishing the world with so many creatures for his use, in giving him dominion over the works of his hands, and making him lord of this lower world.

2. In our redemption by Jesus Christ. O what astonishing goodness was it for the great and glorious God to give his only begotten Son to the death for such vile rebels and enemies as we all are by nature! The goodness of God, under the name of his love, is rendered as the only cause of our redemption by Christ, John 3:16. 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.' This is an inexpressible so, a so that all the angels of heaven cannot analyse. None can conceive or understand the boundless extent and dimensions of it. God gave Christ for us to commend his love, and set it off with an admirable lustre. 'God commended his love towards us (saith the apostle), in that while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us.' O what an expensive goodness and love was this! Our redemption cost God more than what was laid out on the whole creation. 'The redemption of the soul is precious,' says the Psalmist. 'We are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.' Here God parted with his richest jewel, and with the eternal delight of his soul. This cost Christ dear. The Sun of righteousness behoved to be eclipsed, and must veil the beams of his divine glory. He made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was found in the likeness of sinful flesh. He did not appear in worldly pomp and magnificence, attended with a splendid retinue, and faring deliciously, but in a mean and low condition, without a settled dwelling-place, and was exposed to poverty and reproach. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. The last scene of his life was most painful. Upon the very apprehension of his last sufferings it is said, 'he began

to be sorrowful,' as if he had been a stranger to grief till then. He endured with unparalleled patience all that wrath and misery that his people deserved to have suffered for ever in hell. O what a dreadful deluge of wrath and fiery indignation fell from heaven upon our ark, of which that of Noah was only but a type! He was bruised and ground to powder as it were in his agony in the garden. O how did his innocent soul boil under the fire of divine wrath! His blood brake through every pore of the vessel, by the extremity of that flame. God spared not his own Son, but dealt with him in extreme severity. He paid the utmost mite of satisfaction for his people's sins that justice could demand. O what admirable love and goodness is manifested here!

3. In his providential conduct and government. Here we must distinguish a twofold goodness of God, common and special.

(1.) There is God's common goodness, which is common to all the creatures. 'God is good to all,' says the Psalmist. All the creatures taste of his goodness. He preserves them in their beings, continues the species of all things, concurs with them in their distinct offices, and quickens the womb of nature. 'O Lord, thou preservest man and beast,' says David. He visits us every day and makes us feel the effects of his goodness, in 'giving us rain and fruitful seasons,' and filling our hearts with food and gladness. He waters the ground with his showers, and every day shines with new beams of his goodness.

(2.) There is a special goodness of God to his own people, whom he privileges with spiritual and saving blessings. His goodness to them is truly wonderful, in pardoning their iniquities, healing their spiritual diseases, sanctifying their natures, hearing and answering their prayers, bearing with their infirmities, accepting their imperfect services, supporting them under and delivering them from temptations, solving their doubts, directing and guiding them in their difficulties.

4. The goodness of God will be most signally manifested at the last day. It is laid up in heaven, Psal. 31:19. O who can tell how great goodness is laid up there? In heaven they shall have draughts of his goodness, even as much as they can hold. There God will be all in all to them, and communicate himself to them immediately, without the intervention of ordinances.

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

1. God is a merciful God, and delights in mercy, 'His tender mercies are over all his works,' Psal. 145:9. There can be no case so bad as to be above or beyond the reach of mercy, to such as come to him in his own way, Isa. 55:7 seeing his goodness is infinite. The difference between the goodness and mercy of God is, that mercy respects only the miserable, but goodness extends to the happy also.

Object. But how is the severity of God against the wicked, and the godly too, consistent with that infinite goodness?

Ans. It is the property of goodness to hate and punish sin. Hence the Lord said to Moses, Exod. 33:19. 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.' Compare chap. 34:7. 'Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.' The afflictions of the godly are the effect of the divine goodness, and effect goodness in them. Hence says the apostle, Heb. 12:6. 'Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' And says the psalmist, Psal. 119:71. 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.'

2. God can fully satisfy the desire of the soul, and in him it may rest with complacency and delight. He is all-sufficient in and to himself, and all his creatures. And this bountiful God should be the centre of our affections, desires, and joys. We should be restless and uneasy

till we find him, and earnestly long for the rich manifestations of his love and grace.

3. This doctrine of the divine goodness should strongly recommend to us those hard lessons prescribed by our Lord, and which he urges upon his followers from the consideration of his own goodness and beneficence, Mat. 5:44, 45. 'Love your enemies,' &c.

4. Abuse not the divine goodness. This is a great evil, and it is very frequent and common. It began in the first ages of the world, yea, it commenced a few minutes after the creation, and it continues to this very day. O abuse not the goodness of God, by forgetting his benefits, murmuring and repining at your lot and situation in the world, or by taking liberty to sin because of his goodness.

5. Seek not your happiness in created things and enjoyments, but in an ever-bountiful God, who is the spring and source of all goodness and mercy, and who can fully satisfy all the desires of an immortal soul.

Seventhly, The last communicable attribute of God to be taken notice of is his truth, which is that perfection of his nature whereby he is faithful, and free from all falsehood. Hence he is called 'the God that cannot lie,' Tit. 1:2. He is true in himself, Deut. 32:4. 'A God of truth, and without iniquity.' Now God is true,

1. In his works both of creation and providence; and that both in his common and more ordinary works of providence, in preserving and governing the creatures; and extraordinary ones, such as the glorious work of redemption, his great and miraculous operations, and the wonderful preservations of and deliverances granted to his church and people when exposed to the greatest dangers. God is true in all these; as Psal. 111:7, 8, 'The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness.' Psal. 25:10. 'All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth.' It is a part of the church's

song, Rev. 15:3. 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Rev. 16:7. 'Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.' All God's works are true and real things, not chimeras or appearances. He executes true judgments, grants true deliverances, works true miracles; his mercies are true mercies, and his comforts are true comforts. He does not deceive or delude his people with vain shews and appearances.

2. In his word. His word is most pure truth. 'Thy word is truth,' says our Saviour, John 17:17. And,

(1.) God is true in all the doctrines which he hath revealed. There is no flaw nor corruption in any of them. They are all the true form of sound words. And especially he is true in the doctrines of the gospel. Hence we read of the 'truth of the gospel,' Gal. 2:5; and the gospel is called 'the word of truth,' Eph. 1:13. Some of the doctrines revealed there are above the reach of human reason, as the doctrines of the glorious and adorable Trinity, the union of the two natures in the person of Christ, and the mystical union between him and believers. But though they cannot be comprehended by reason, they are not contrary to it.

(2.) In the historical narratives which he hath recorded in his word, as those of the creation, the fall of man, the drowning of the old world with the deluge, the incarnation of Christ, the many miracles which he wrought, his life and bloody death, &c. In these and other historical relations which we have in the word of God, there is no lie nor mistake at all. Hence Luke says, in his preface to his history, chap. 1:3, 4. 'It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightst know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed.'

(3.) In his prophetic predictions. None of them fail or come short of their accomplishment, but are all fulfilled in their season. A man may

foretel such things as depend on natural causes, as rain and snow, heat and cold, the eclipses of the sun and moon, &c. But things are foretold in the scriptures which are merely contingent, depending upon the free grace of God, or the free will of man, as the rejecting of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, &c. None of its predictions have fallen to the ground. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his words shall not pass away. The Lord tells the prophet, 'The vision is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie,' Hab. 2:3. And after divers prophetic predictions, it is said, Rev. 22:6. 'These sayings are faithful and true.'

(4.) In his commands. All his commands are faithful, and his law is truth. All his precepts which he has given us are counterparts of his own heart, real copies of his approving will. The matter of them is exactly consonant to his holiness, and most acceptable and well-pleasing in his sight. God approves of all that he commands: so that his precepts are a true and perfect rule of holiness, without any flaw or defect.

(5.) In his threatenings. They are always accomplished in their season; not one of them shall fail. Says the Lord to the Jews, by the prophet, Zech. 1:6. 'Did not my word take hold of your fathers?' And the apostle Paul tells us, Rom. 2:2. 'We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.' It is true, indeed, some threatenings are conditional, and to be understood with the exception of repentance; so that unfeigned repentance and reformation prevent the execution of them; as is clear in the case of Nineveh, and from Jer. 18:7, 8. 'At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.' But divine threatenings will surely be executed upon impenitent and incorrigible sinners.

(6.) In his promises. All the promises are yea and amen, i. e. there shall be an infallible accomplishment of them. Therefore promised

blessings are called sure mercies, Is. 55:3. And the gospel, which is the compend of all the promises, is often called the word of truth. God's people have found the truth of the promises many times in their comfortable experience. Says Joshua to the Israelites, Joshua 23:14. 'Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.' Joshua was now about to die, and therefore could not be supposed to feign and dissemble; and he appeals to their own consciences, 'Ye know,' &c. And Solomon speaks to the same purpose, 1 Kings 8:56. 'Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.' All the promises which he hath made to his people shall have their accomplishment in due time. Now, the truth of God is most frequently taken in this sense in scripture, and in this his faithfulness doth peculiarly consist. And,

[1.] This truth and faithfulness of God shines with peculiar lustre in accomplishing the many promises recorded in the holy scriptures; such as that made to Abraham concerning his seed, that, after their sojourning in a strange land four hundred and thirty years, they should come out again with great substance; which was punctually fulfilled, as Moses tells us, Exod. 12:41. 'And it came to pass, at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.' Such also was the accomplishment of the promise relating to the return of the Israelites from the Babylonish captivity after seventy years. No length of time nor distance of place can wear the remembrance of his promise from the divine mind. 'He remembered his holy promise,' says the Psalmist, 'and Abraham his servant,' Psal. 105:42.

[2.] In accomplishing the promises concerning the Messiah. So it is said, Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ; grace in regard of our pardon, and truth in regard of the promise of God. This appears in

performing the promise of Christ's incarnation after so many revolutions of time, and many expectations of his coming, and many contrary appearances, and long stay of four thousand years after the first promise. After all this, God made good his word, by sending his Son into the world.—It appears in performing the promise of his death and sufferings. God passed his word to the church, that his Son should suffer death and the wrath of God for elect sinners. And having once passed his word for this, he would not spare him. Rather than God should break his word, his own dear Son must suffer a painful, shameful, and cursed death in his body, and the wrath of God in his innocent soul.—It appears in performing the promise of his resurrection from the dead. God had said, he would not leave his soul in hell. [the state of the dead], nor suffer his holy One to see corruption. This prophecy and promise was accordingly fulfilled: for he was raised from the dead in solemn triumph. Angels attended his resurrection, and the earth trembled and shook, as a sign of triumph and a token of victory; by which Christ intimated to the whole world, that he had overcome death in his own dominions, and lifted up his head as a glorious conqueror over all his enemies. It was promised that he should rise from the dead on the third day; and this was made good to a tittle.

(3.) In fulfilling his promises, when great difficulties and seeming improbabilities lay in the way of their accomplishment. Thus God promised to give Abraham a son, and he made it good, though Sarah was barren, and both Abraham and she were past age. Again, he brought back the captives from Babylon, though the thing seemed most improbable, and many great difficulties lay in the way. Difficulties are for men, not for God. 'Is any thing too hard for Jehovah?' Gen. 18:14. See Zech. 8:6. He is not tied to the road of human probabilities. He will turn nature upside-down, rather than not be as good as his word.

(4.) In fulfilling promises to his people, when their hopes and expectations have been given up. See instances, Ezek. 37:11. Isa. 49:14. There may be much unbelief in good men, their faith may be

sorely staggered. Yet God is faithful and true. Men may question his promise, but God cannot deny himself, 2 Tim. 2:13.

(5.) God's truth and faithfulness in keeping promise is confirmed by testimonies given to it by the saints in all ages. They have all set to their seal that God is true. They have all borne witness for God, and attested his unspotted faithfulness to the generations that were to come. See instances, Deut. 7:9. Josh. 23:14. 1 Kings 8:56. Psal. 146:6. All learned men are for experiments: now, the saints in all ages have made experiments upon God's word of promise, and have always found him to be true and faithful. 'The word of the Lord is tried,' says the Psalmist. None that relied on his promise were ever disappointed.

We may here also take a short view of the grounds of God's faithfulness. There are divers glorious attributes and perfections of the divine nature, upon which his truth and faithfulness in keeping promise is built, as so many strong and unshaken pillars. As,

1. His perfect knowledge of all things past. His knowledge is called 'a book of remembrance,' Mal. 3:16 to signify the continual presence of all things past before him. Men do often break their word, because they forget their promise; but forgetfulness cannot befall a God of infinite knowledge. He will ever be mindful of his covenant, and remember his holy covenant and promises, as the Psalmist speaks.

2. His immutability. Though men in making promises may have a real purpose to perform them, yet they may afterwards change their mind. But God is always firm to his purpose, and cannot change his mind, because of his unchangeable nature. Mal. 3:6. Jam. 1:17. Again men are often inconsiderate in making promises, and do often meet with what they did not foresee, but all events are eternally foreseen by God. So all his promises are made with infinite wisdom and judgment. To this purpose is that promise, Hos. 2:19. 'I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in

righteousness and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies.'

3. His power. Whatsoever he hath promised to his people, he is able to perform it. Sometimes men falsify their promise, and cannot make good their word through a defect of power. But God never out-promised himself. He can do whatsoever he pleased to do. It is said, Psal. 135:6. 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth,' &c. Yea, all things are possible with God. This was the foundation of Abraham's faith, which kept it from staggering at the thoughts of the improbabilities which lay in the way of the accomplishment of the promises, Rom. 4:21. In the case of civil debts, many a man cannot keep his promise, because others break to him. But though the whole creation should break, God is as able as ever. Hence the prophet says, Hab. 3:17, 18. 'Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' Believers in Christ can never be undone, though the whole creation should disband and go into ruin.

4. His holiness. Some men are so wicked and malicious, that though they can yet they will not keep their word. But it is not so with God. He cannot be charged with any wickedness; for there is no unrighteousness in him, Psal. 92:15 by reason of the perfect holiness of his nature. It is impossible for him to lie. The deceitfulness and treachery that is to be found in men, flows from the corruption that is lodged in their hearts: but the divine nature is infinitely pure and holy. 'God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?' Numb. 23:19.

5. His justice and righteousness. A man by virtue of a promise hath a right to the thing promised; so that it is his due; and justice requires to give every one his due. So God by his promise makes himself a

debtor, and his justice obliges him to pay. Hence it is said, 1 John 1:9. 'God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.' He is faithful to pardon, as he hath promised it; and faithful in keeping promise, because he is just. Though it was his goodness and mercy to make the promise, yet his justice binds him to make it good. It is true, when God makes himself a debtor by his promise, it is indeed a debt of grace; yet it is a debt which it is just for God to pay. Therefore his word of promise is called 'the word of his righteousness,' Psal. 119:123.

6. The glory and honour of his name may give us full assurance of his faithfulness in making good his promises. He doth all things for his own glory; and therefore, wherever you find a promise, the honour of God is given as security for the performance of it. Hence his people plead this as a mighty argument to work for them. So Joshua, chap. 7:9. 'What wilt thou do unto thy great name?' q. d. 'O Lord, thy honour is a thousand times more valuable than our lives. It is of little importance what become of us. But, O! it is of infinite importance that the glory of thy name be secured, and thy faithfulness kept pure and unspotted in the world.' We find Moses pleading to the same purpose, Exod. 32:11, 12. 'Lord why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt, with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people;' q. d. 'It will be sad enough for the hands of the Egyptians to fall upon thy people; but infinitely worse for the tongues of the Egyptians to fall upon thy name.' In a word, the glory of all God's attributes is engaged for the performance of his promises, especially his faithfulness and power. Now, these are strong pillars upon which God's truth and faithfulness in keeping promise is built. He can as soon cease to be omniscient, unchangeable, omnipotent, infinitely just and holy, as he can cease to be true and faithful. He can as soon divest himself of his glory, and draw an eternal veil over all the

shining perfections and excellencies of his nature, as cease to be faithful and true.

But it is high time to finish this subject.

Inf. 1. Is God infinitely true? Then all hypocrisy and dissimulation, all falsehood and dishonesty, all lying, cheating, and double-dealing, is most hateful to God, is most opposite to his holy nature, and flows from the devil and our lusts, as father and mother to them, John 8:44.

2. This lets us see what a sure foundation we have for our faith in believing the truth of what is revealed in the holy scriptures; for they are the word of the God of truth, the word of God that cannot lie. The truth of God is an immoveable rock, upon which we may safely venture our salvation. The public faith of heaven is engaged for the happiness of believers; and can they ever have better security? The whole earth hangs upon the word of God's power; and shall not our faith hang upon the word of God's truth? There is nothing else we can rest upon, but the truth and faithfulness of God. We cannot trust in an arm of flesh, for this will fail us in the time of our need; nor can we trust in our own hearts, for the Spirit of God tells us that he that doth so is a fool. All other things are sandy foundations, which cannot abide the storm and trial: but the truth of God is an immoveable rock that cannot be shaken.

3. Hence we see that the reformed Protestant religion is the only true religion that is in the world, because it is built upon the infallible truth and veracity of God. We have reason to be thankful to God, that it is not built upon such sandy foundations as human unwritten traditions, or any human testimony whatsoever. It is built upon the God of truth, and not upon fallible men. We admit the testimony of the church as an help to our faith, but not as the ground and foundation of it. The precious truths which we believe, we receive them not upon the testimony of the churches, Popes, or councils, but upon the testimony of the God of truth that cannot lie. But the

Popish religion hath no sure foundation. The faith of Papists is built upon the testimony of men; so that their religion hath no more certainty in it, than these men have of infallibility.

4. Hence we may see matter of dreadful terror to all the wicked; for all the threatenings and curses of the law of a faithful God stand in full force against them, and will at last overwhelm them with rapid fury, if they do not fly to the mercy and grace of God, as manifested in Jesus Christ, who by his obedience unto death satisfied all the demands of law and justice, in the room of all who will take the benefit of his undertaking. Though in their atheistical unbelief they may bless themselves, saying, that they shall have peace, though they walk in the imagination of their hearts, to add drunkenness unto thirst; yet the Lord will not spare them, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against them, and all the curses that are written in his holy book shall light upon them; yea his wrathful vengeance, like an overflowing scourge, shall sweep them off the sinful stage of time into the depths of the devouring pit, where is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

5. Lastly, Imitate God in this his adorable perfection, by 'speaking the truth in love,' Eph. 4:15. Let the strictest rules of truth and sincerity be observed by you in all your dealings and intercourse with men. Lay aside all lying, falsehood, and dissimulation, all equivocations and secret reservations in your words and promises, and speak the truth every man with his neighbour.

Thus we have given you a short description of what God is. Imperfect it is, and imperfect it must be, seeing he is incomprehensible. Do ye study to believe what is taught you of God, and apply to him, through the Son of his love, for further discoveries of his glorious perfections and excellencies; and at length ye shall see him as he is, having a more enlarged and extensive knowledge of him, his nature and ways; though even then ye will not be able to comprehend him. For it was a wise and judicious answer of one that was asked, What God is? that if he knew that fully, he should be a God himself. And indeed that

being which we can comprehend, cannot be God, because he is infinite. O study God and ye will increase in the knowledge of him.

OF THE UNITY OF GOD

DEUT. 6:4.—Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one LORD.

1 COR. 8:4.—We know that there is none other God but one.

COMPARE JER. 10:10.—But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God.

WE have, in several preceding discourses, been endeavouring a little to explain the description of God that is given in our shorter Catechism, agreeable to the holy scriptures; and although it has been very imperfect, seeing it is but little of God we can know here; yet I hope what has been said upon it will tend to your instruction, and establishment in the faith, I now proceed to the next question, relating to the unity of God; which we have very clearly and strongly confirmed by the three passages of scripture which I have read.

In the first of these texts there are two things which we are taught to believe concerning God. (1.) That he is JEHOVAH, a being infinitely and eternally perfect, self-existent, and self-sufficient. (2.) That he is the one only God. Let us therefore have no other, nor desire to have any other. Some have thought that in this text there is a plain intimation of the Trinity of Persons in the unity of the Godhead; for here the name of God is thrice mentioned, and yet all declared to be but one. Happy they who have this one Lord for their God; for they have but one master to please, and but one benefactor to seek to.

In the second text the unity of God is also clearly asserted: There is none other God but one.

The third text presents us with a very amiable representation of God. (1.) As the true God. He is not a counterfeit and a mere pretender to divinity, as idols are; but he is really what he has revealed himself to be. He is one upon whom we may depend, and in whom and by whom we cannot be deceived. (2.) As the living God. He is life itself, has life in himself, and is the fountain of life to all the creatures. The gods of the heathen are dead things, worthless and useless; but ours is the living God and hath immortality.

From the three passages of scripture compared together, the following doctrine natively arises, viz.

DOCT. 'There is but one only, the living and true God.'

In discoursing this point, I shall shew,

I. Why God is called the living God.

II. Why he is called the true God.

III. That there is but one God.

IV. Deduce some inferences.

I. I am to shew why God is called the living God.

1. He is called the living God, in opposition to, and to distinguish him from dead idols, Psal. 115:4, 5, 6. 1 Thess. 1:9. These were but dead and lifeless things, stocks and stones, silver and gold, which the heathen nations did worship, neglecting the God that made the heavens and the earth. In this respect these idols were viler than the matter of which they were made, as the tree when in the ground had some life, but they had none.

2. Because God is the fountain of life, having all life in himself, John 5:26, and giving life to all things else. All life is in him and from him. (1.) Natural life, Acts 17:28. 'For in him we live.' 1 Tim. 6:13. 'Who

quickeneth all things.' (2.) Spiritual life, Eph. 2:1. 'You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins.' (3.) Eternal life, Col. 3:4. 'Christ is our life.' His giving of these to the creatures proves that they are in him, though in a more eminent way; for nothing can give what it has not.

II. I proceed to shew why he is called the true God.

He is so called to distinguish him from all false or fictitious gods. Hence the apostle speaks of the Thessalonians having 'turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God,' 1 Thess. 1:9. And says the prophet, Jer. 10:11. 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens.' The heathens, besides their worship of dead idols, worshipped also living creatures, Deut. 32:17. 'They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up.' They were only gods in their blinded opinion and foolish fancy, not in reality; no more than the picture of a man, mistaken for a man, is a true man.

There is a twofold truth. (1.) Of fidelity or faithfulness. Thus God is true, that is, faithful, as was before explained. But that is not the truth here meant. (2.) A truth of essence, whereby a thing really is, and does not exist in opinion only. Thus the greatest liar is a true man; that is, he is really a man. It is in this sense that truth is attributed to God here. And the meaning is, that there is a true God, and but one true God. That there is a true God, or that truly and really there is a God, may be clearly demonstrated against atheists, by the light of nature, seeing they refuse scripture-testimony.

1. The works of creation and providence declare that there is a God. The heavens, earth, sea, air, and all that in them is, evidently proclaim their Maker to be divine. Look to the heaven, and behold how it is adorned with sun, moon, and stars. How wisely are these heavenly bodies situated with respect to us! Were they nearer, they would scorch and burn up the earth; were they placed at a greater

distance, the earth would be bound with perpetual frost, and so be quite barren. How regularly do these heavenly bodies move, making night and day, summer and winter, in so orderly a manner, that these revolutions have never once ceased! If we consider the earth, we shall find it hang as a ball or globe in the air, yet its foundation immoveable, though hung upon nothing. How is it adorned with trees, flowers, corns, &c. and all things necessary for the use of man and beast! And what an instance of divine wisdom is it, that all things are not found in every place, that so commerce betwixt man and man may be advanced, and correspondence be established betwixt different and distant nations, in the reciprocal exchange of the commodities peculiar to each country! Are there not in these the brightest traces of order and symmetry, that point out a God as the former and preserver of them all? But let us look to man, that abridgement of the world, where the prints of a Divine Being appear in the brightest colours. The composition of his body, and the powers of his soul, may convince you of the existence of a Deity. For who but a God could unite such different substances, an immaterial spirit with an earthly body? who could distinguish so many parts, assign to them their situation, form, and temperature, with an absolute fitness for those uses to which they serve? Well may we say with the apostle, Acts 17:27, 28. 'He is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being.' We may find him in the activity of our hands, in the beauty of our eyes, and in the vivacity of our senses. And to look inward, who hath endued the soul with such distinct and admirable faculties; the understanding, which exercises an empire over all things, compounds the most disagreeing, and divides the most intimate, by the lowest effects ascends to the highest cause; the will, which with such vigour pursues that which we esteem amiable and good, and recoils with aversion from that which we judge paining and evil; the memory, which preserves fresh and lively images of those things which are committed to its charge? Certainly then there is a God who made us.

As these things have a being, it leads us to the being of a God: for these things cannot be eternal; for then their being would be a

necessary being, and so not capable of alteration or destruction. If they had a beginning, they had it from another: then that must either have had it from itself, or another, and so on till we come to the first cause, which is God. For nothing can give itself a being, because so it should be and not be at one and the same time. And the order speaks out infinite wisdom that has so ruled and disposed all; or else it must be attributed to chance; which is far more absurd than to say that a most beautiful fabric was made by the fortuitous concourse of stones, timber, lime, &c. which is shocking to common sense.

2. Conscience tells men there is a God. It may be observed how it stirs up to duty, though the powers of the world would forbid it under the highest pains; it comforts a man after duty is performed, though he be persecuted for it. It condemns and stings a man for sin, even for secret sins unknown to any in the world, and that even where there is no hazard at all from that quarter. These are terrors that no art can pluck up, nor any force quell; and when men are going out of the world, are most lively and pungent, even when their judgment is most clear, and free from the clouds and the prejudices of passions. How could these things be, if there were not a God, who by an omnipotent hand has planted conscience in their bosoms, as his own vicegerent, that stings them when none sees them? Athiests may, with as much hope of success, attempt to pull the sun, moon, and stars out of heaven, as to eradicate these innate impressions of a Supreme Divine Being.

3. The universal and perpetual consent of all nations in this matter, evinces that there is a God. That must needs be a natural truth, that in all ages, all nations, however different in all other things, have yet held that there is a God, so that they would rather worship any thing than not have some God. Go back to ancient times; ask your fathers and they will tell you, your forefathers and your most ancient ancestors, and they will declare unto you, both that there is a God, and what he did in their days, and in the old times before them. Nay, inquire of the nations round about you, Spain and Turkey, the barbarous Tartars, the wild Africans, and the ignorant Americans,

and they will all with one mouth confess this undeniable truth, That there is a God. This is an universal dictate of nature, spread as far and wide as reason and mankind are on the face of the earth. Some were called atheists among the heathens, not because they owned no God, but because they disowned their false gods. And if their have been any speculative atheists, that is, such who have been at all times thoroughly persuaded that that there is no Supreme Divine Being, they have been still looked on as monsters of men, and prodigies in nature, which have been universally abhorred as pests of society, and enemies to mankind. But the truth is, whatever advances men may make towards atheism in their depraved judgments, yet it is absolutely impossible to get the notion of a Deity rooted quite out of the soul.

Let not the athiest (if such a creature can possibly exist in a human form) pretend, that this universal belief of a divine existence which has obtained in the world, is the product of a successful political device, contrived by its crafty governors to keep it in awe and subjection to themselves. For as this is nothing but a cunning insinuation to support the worst of causes, so it is absolutely unaccountable how this device should be so prevalent as to gain ground in the consciences of men, and exercise such an uncontrollable empire over them. Is it possible that a few crafty men should so impose upon all the world, and they should never be, and, for any thing can be seen, shall never be able to free themselves from the fraud?

4. Lastly, Will ye consider the multitude of miracles which have occurred in the world. If these wonders of nature which we call miracles be nothing else but a mere lie and forgery, how comes the world to be so generally imposed on? How comes not only the Jewish but the Christian religion to be confirmed and ratified in such a firm manner as they have been amongst men? But if it be true that nature's bonds are sometimes broken, that the ordinary methods of things and actions are crossed, and turned quite another way; if ever the sun stood still, or the angels were seen on an embassy from

heaven; if ever God appeared in a flaming bush, and talked with man from the clouds; if ever sin was punished with a shower of fire and brimstone from heaven; in a word, if ever diseases were cured by a touch, and the dead raised to life by prayer: I say, if all these things be true, then answer me, Who is so able and so bold thus to transgress all the laws and bands of nature? Certainly it can be no other than God.

III. I come now to shew that there is but one God. There are gods many, and lords many, in title and the opinion of men; but there is only one true God, having no fellow or competitor. This great and important truth I shall endeavour to confirm, both from scripture and reason.

1. The scripture is very express and pointed on this head: Deut. 6:4. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.' 'Isa. 44:6. 'I am the first, and the last, and besides me there is no God.' Mark 12:32. 'There is one God, and there is none other but he.' Consult also the following passages, which clearly establish this article, viz. 1 Sam. 2:2. Psal. 18:31. Isa. 46:9. 1 Cor. 8:4, 6.

2. This truth is clear from reason.

(1.) There can be but one First Cause, which hath its being of itself, and gave being to all other things, and on which all other beings depend, and that is God: for one such is sufficient for the production, preservation, and government of all things: and therefore more are superfluous, for there is no need of them at all. Certainly he that made the world can preserve, govern, and guide it, without the assistance of any other God; for if he needed any assistance, he were not God himself, an infinitely perfect and all-sufficient being. And whatever power, wisdom, or other requisite perfections can be imagined to be in many gods, for making, preserving, and governing the world, all these are in one infinitely-perfect being. Therefore it is useless to feign many, seeing one is sufficient.

(2.) There can be but one infinite being, and therefore there is but one God. Two infinities imply a contradiction. Seeing God fills heaven and earth with his presence, and is infinite in all the perfections and excellencies of his nature, there can be no place for another infinite to subsist.

(3.) There can be but one Independent Being, and therefore but one God. [1.] There can be but one independent in being: for if there were more gods, either one of them would be the cause and author of being to the rest, and then that one would be the only God: or none of them would be the cause and author of being to the rest, and so none of them would be God; because none of them would be independent, or the fountain of being to all. [2.] There can be but one independent in working. For if there were more independent beings, then in those things wherein they will and act freely, they might will and act contrary things, and so oppose and hinder one another: so that being equal in power, nothing would be done by either of them. Yea, though we should suppose a plurality of gods agreeing in all things, yet seeing their mutual consent and agreement would be necessary to every action, it plainly appears, that each of them would necessarily depend on the rest in his operations; and so none of them would be God, because not absolutely independent.

(4.) There can be but one Omnipotent. For if there were two omnipotent beings, then the one is able to do whatsoever he will, and yet the other is able to resist and hinder him. And if the one cannot hinder the other, then that other is not omnipotent. Again, we must conceive two such beings, either as agreeing, and so the one would be superfluous; or as disagreeing, and so all would be brought to confusion, or nothing would be done at all; for that which the one would do, the other would oppose and hinder; just like a ship with two pilots of equal power, where the one would be ever cross to the other; when the one would sail, the other would cast anchor. Here would be a continual confusion, and the ship must needs perish. The order and harmony of the world, the constant and uniform

government of all things, is a plain argument, that there is but one only Omnipotent being that rules all.

(5.) The supposition of a plurality of gods is destructive to all true religion. For if there were more than one God, we would be obliged to worship and serve more than one. But this it is impossible for us to do; as will plainly appear, if ye consider what divine worship and service is. Religious worship and adoration must be performed with the whole man. This is what the divine eminence and excellency requires, that we love him with all our heart, soul and strength, and serve him with all the powers and faculties of our souls, and members of our bodies; and that our whole man, time, strength, and all we have, be entirely devoted to him alone. But this cannot be done to a plurality of gods. For in serving and worshipping a plurality, our hearts and strength, our time and talents, would be divided among them. To this purpose our Lord argues, Matth. 6:24. 'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' Mammon is thought to be an idol, which the heathens reckoned to be the god of money and riches. Now, says Christ, you cannot serve them both; if you would have the Lord for your God, and serve him, you must renounce mammon. We cannot serve two gods or masters: if but one require our whole time and strength, we cannot serve the other.

6. If there might be more gods than one, nothing would hinder why there might not be one, or two, or three millions of them. No argument can be brought for a plurality of gods, suppose two or three, but what a man might, by purity of reason, make use of for ever so many. Hence it is, that when men have once begun to fancy a plurality of gods, they have been endless in such fancies and imaginations. To this purpose is that charge against the Jews, who in this conformed themselves very much to the nations round about them, 'According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah,' Jer. 2:28. Varro reckons up three hundred gods whom the heathens worshipped, and Hesiod reckons about three thousand of them.

Indeed, if we once begin to fancy more gods than one, where shall we make an end? So that the opinion or conception of a plurality of gods is most ridiculous and irrational.

And this should be observed against those who pretend, that the Father is the most high God, and that there is no most high God but one, yet that there is another true God, viz. Christ, who in very deed, as to them, is but a mere man; yet they pretend he is the true God. Christ is God, and the true and most high God. But, in opposition to them, consider that to be a man and to be a God are opposite, and cannot be said of one in respect of one nature, Jer. 31:3. Acts 14:15. Jer. 10:11.

I shall now shut up this subject with a few inferences.

1. Wo to atheists, then, whether they be such in heart or life; for their case is dreadful and desperate: and they shall sooner or later feel the heaviest strokes of the vengeance of that God whom they impiously deny, whether in opinion or by works. To dissuade from this fearful wickedness, consider,

(1.) That atheism is most irrational. It is great folly; and therefore the Psalmist saith, Psal. 14:1. 'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.' It is contrary to the stream of universal reason; contrary to the natural dictates of the atheist's own soul; and contrary to the testimony of every creature. The atheist hath as many arguments against him as there are creatures in heaven and earth. Besides, it is most unreasonable for any man to hazard himself on this bottom in the denial of a God. May he not reason thus with himself, what if there be a God, for any thing that I know? then what a dreadful case will I be in when I find it so? If there be a God, and I fear and serve him, I gain a blessed and glorious eternity; but if there be no God, I lose nothing but my sordid lusts, by believing that there is one. Now, ought not reasonable creatures to argue thus with themselves? What a doleful meeting will there be between the God who is denied, and the atheist that denies him! He will meet with fearful reproaches on

God's part, and with dreadful terrors on his own: all that he gains is but a liberty to sin here, and a certainty to suffer for it hereafter, if he be in an error, as undoubtedly he is.

(2.) Atheism is most impious. What horrid impiety is it for men to deny their Creator a being, without whose goodness they could have had none themselves? Nay, every atheist is a Deicide, a killer of God as much as in him lies. He aims at the destruction of his very being. The atheist says upon the matter, that God is unworthy of a being, and that it were well if the world were rid of him.

(3.) Atheism is of pernicious consequence both to others and to the atheist himself. To others: for (1.) It would root out the foundation of government, and demolish all order among men. The being of God is the great guard of the world: for it is the sense of a Deity, upon which all civil order in cities and kingdoms is founded. Without this, there is no tie upon the consciences of men to restrain them from the most atrocious impieties and villanies. A city of atheists would be a heap of confusion. There could be no traffic nor commerce, if all the sacred bonds of it in the consciences of men were thus snapt asunder by denying the existence of God. (2.) It is introductive of all evil into the world. If you take away God, you take away conscience, and thereby all rules of good and evil. And how could any laws be made, when the measure and standard of them is removed? for all good laws are founded upon the dictates of conscience and reason, and upon common sentiments in human nature, which spring from a sense of God. So that if the foundation be destroyed, the whole superstructure must needs tumble down. A man might be a thief, a murderer, and an adulterer, and yet in a strict sense not be an offender. The worst of actions could not be evil, if a man were a god to himself. Where there is no sense of God, the bars are removed, and the flood gates of all impiety rush in upon mankind. The whole earth would be filled with violence, and all flesh would corrupt their way.

Again, atheism is pernicious to the atheist himself, who denies the being of God, or endeavours to erase all notions of the Deity out of his mind. What can he gain by this but a sordid pleasure, unworthy of a reasonable nature? And suppose there were no God, what can he lose but his fleshly lusts, by believing there is one? By believing and confessing a God, a man ventures no loss; but by denying him, he runs the most desperate hazard if there be one. For this exposes him to the most dreadful wrath and vengeance of God. If there be a hotter receptacle in hell than another, it will be reserved for the atheist, who strikes and fights against God's very being.

(4.) Atheists are worse than heathens: for they worshipped many gods, but these worship none at all. They preserved some notion of God in the world, but these would banish him from both heaven and earth. They degraded him, but these would destroy him. Yea, they are worse than the very devils: for the devils are under the dread of this truth, That God is. It is said they 'believe and tremble,' Jam. 2:19. It is impossible for them to be atheists in opinion; for they feel there is a God by that sense of his wrath that torments them. There may be atheists in the church, but there are none in hell. Thus atheism is a most dreadful evil, most carefully to be guarded against.

Inf. 2. Seeing there is one only the living and true God, we owe the most perfect and unlimited obedience to his will. We are to obey the will of his command with readiness and alacrity; and submit to the will of his providence with the utmost cheerfulness, without fretting or murmuring.

Inf. 3. Is God one? then his children should live in unity, that they may be one as he is one. They should study to be one in judgment and opinion, one in affection, and one in practice. We should all live as the family of one God, carefully avoiding divisions, and whatever may tend to interrupt the communion of saints.

Inf. 4. Seeing God is one, he should be the centre of our affections, love, fear, delight, joy, &c. Deut. 6:4, 5. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our

God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.'

I shall conclude all with a few directions.

1. Beware of such opinions as tend to atheism, and aim at the undermining of this supreme truth, that God is. There are many opinions which have a woful tendency this way. Such is that of denying the immortality of the soul. This is a stroke at a distance at the very being of God, who is the Supreme Spirit. There is an order among spirits; first, the souls of men, then angels, and then God. Now, these degrees of spirits are, as it were, a rail and fence about the sense we have of the being and majesty of God. And such as deny the immortality of the soul, strike at a distance at the eternity and existence of the Deity.

Another opinion is, that men of all religions shall be saved; so that it is no matter what religion a man be of, if he walk according to the principles of it, and be of a sober moral life. In these latter times some are grown weary of the Christian religion, and by an excess of charity betray their faith, and plead for the salvation of heathens, Turks, and infidels. But ye should remember, that, as there is but one God, and one heavenly Jerusalem, so there is but one faith, and one way by which men can come to the enjoyment of God there. Such libertine principles have a manifest tendency to shake people loose of all religion. To make many doors to heaven, as one says, is to widen the gates of hell.

Another opinion tending to atheism is, the denying of God's providence in the government of the world. Some make him an idle spectator of what is done here below, asserting that he is contented with his own blessedness and glory, and that whatever is without him is neither in his thoughts nor care. Many think that this world is but as a great clock or machine, which was set a-going at first by God, and afterwards left to its own motion. But if ye exempt any thing from the dominion of providence, then you will soon run into all

manner of libertinism. If Satan and wicked men may do what they will, and God be only a looker-on, and not concerned with human affairs, then ye may worship the devil, lest he hurt you, and fear men though God be propitious to you.

2. Beware of indulging sin. When ye take a liberty to sin, and gratify your vile and sordid lusts, you will hate the law that forbids it; and this will lead you to a hatred of the Lawgiver; and hatred of God strikes against his very being. When once you allow yourselves an indulgence to sin, you will be apt to think, O that there were no God to punish me for my crimes! and would gladly persuade yourselves that there is none; and will think it your only game to do what ye can to root out the notions of God in your own minds, for your own quiet, that so ye may wallow in sin without remorse.

3. Prize and study the holy scriptures, for they shew clearly that there is a God. There are more clear marks and characters of a Deity stamped upon the holy scriptures than upon all the works of nature. Therefore converse much with them. By this means was Junius converted from atheism. His father perceiving him to be so atheistical, caused lay a Bible in every room, so that in whatsoever room he entered, a Bible haunted him; and he fancied it upbraided him thus: 'Wilt thou not read me, atheist? wilt thou not read me?' Whereupon he read it, and was thereby converted. I say then, study the holy scriptures, and in doing so, learn to submit your reason to divine revelation. For some men, neglecting the scriptures, and going forth in the pride of their own understandings, have at last disputed themselves into flat atheism.

4. Study God in the creatures as well as in the scriptures. The creatures were all made to be heralds of the divine glory, and his glorious being and perfections appear evidently in them. Hence saith the Psalmist, Psal. 19:1–4. 'The heavens declare the glory of God? and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech, nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out

through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world: in them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.' The world is sometimes compared to a book, and sometimes to a preacher. The universe is like a great printed book, wherein God sets forth himself to our view; and the great diversity of creatures which are in it, are so many letters, out of which we may spell his name. And they all preach loudly unto us the glorious being and excellencies of God. And therefore the apostle tells us, Rom. 1:20, 'The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.' In the book of the creatures God hath written a part of the excellency of his name; and you should learn to read God wherever he hath made himself legible to you.

5. Lastly, Ye who are yet sinners, lying in your natural state of sin and misery, come unto God in Christ, and receive him as your God by faith, and so ye will be preserved from atheism. And ye who are believers in Christ, be often viewing God in your own experiences of him. Have you not often found God in the strengthening, reviving, and refreshing influences of his grace upon your souls? Have ye not had sweet manifestations of his love? Have you not had frequent refreshing tastes of his goodness, in pardoning your iniquities, hearing and answering your prayers, supplying your wants, and feasting your souls? The reviewing of such experiences will be a mighty preservative against atheism. Can you doubt of his being, when you have been so often revived, refreshed, and supported by him? The secret touches of God upon your hearts, and your inward converses with him, are to you a clearer evidence of the being of God, than all the works of nature.

OF THE HOLY TRINITY

¹ JOHN 5:7.—For there are three that bear record in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.

IN the 5th verse of this chapter, John lays down a fundamental article of the Christian faith, That Jesus is the Son of God; and brings in the witnesses of this truth, ver. 7 and 8. The text condescends on the divine heavenly witnesses. Where, consider,

1. Their number, three, viz. three persons.
2. Their names, the Father, the Word, that is, the Son, so called, because he reveals the Father's mind, and the Holy Ghost. And here is noted the order of their subsisting also.
3. The majesty and glory of these witnesses; they are in heaven, manifesting their glory there, and from it have borne record; which should make the inhabitants of the world to believe their testimony.
4. Their act: They bear record to this truth.
5. Their unity: They are one, one God; not only one in consent and agreement, but one thing, one substance, one essence.

The doctrine evidently arising from the words is,

DOCT. 'There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.'

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

- I. Explain the terms mentioned in the doctrine, the Godhead, and a person.

II. Shew that there are three persons in the Godhead.

III. Prove that these three are distinct persons.

IV. Demonstrate that these three persons are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

V. Evince the weight and importance of this article of the Christian faith.

VI. Lastly, Deduce a few inferences.

I. I am to explain the terms mentioned in the doctrine, the Godhead, and a person.

1. By the Godhead is meant the nature or essence of God, Acts 17:29, even as by manhood is understood the nature of man. Now the Godhead is but one, there being but one God.

2. A divine person, or a person in the Godhead, is the Godhead distinguished by personal properties, Heb. 1:3, where Christ the Son of God is called 'the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.' For consider the Godhead as the fountain or principle of the Deity, so it is the first person; consider it as begotten of the Father, it is the second; and as proceeding from the Father and the Son, it is the third person.

II. Our next business is to shew that there are three persons in the Godhead. This is confirmed by the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament.

1. The Old Testament plainly holds forth a plurality of persons in the Godhead, Gen. 1:26. 'God said, let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.' Chap. 3:22. 'And the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.' This cannot be understood of angels: for man is said to be created after the image of God, but never after the image of angels; and the temptation was, 'Ye

shall be as gods,' not as angels. Nor must it be conceived, that God speaks so after the manner of kings; for that way of speaking is used rather to note modesty than royalty. But when God speaks so as to discover most of his royalty, he speaks in the singular number, as in the giving of the law, 'I am the Lord thy God.' This trinity of persons is also not obscurely mentioned in Psal. 33:6. 'By the Word of the Lord, or JEHOVAH, were the heavens made; and all the host of them, by the breath, or Spirit, of his mouth.' Here is mention made of Jehovah the Word and the Spirit, as jointly acting in the work of creation. Accordingly we find, that 'all things were made by the Word,' John 1:3 and that 'the Spirit garnished the heavens,' Job 26:13. Nay, a Trinity of persons is mentioned, Isa. 63 where, besides that the Lord, or Jehovah, is three times spoken of, ver. 7 we read, of 'the angel of his presence,' which denotes two persons, and 'his Spirit,' ver. 9, 10. So that it evidently appears, that the doctrine of the Trinity was revealed under the Old Testament.

2. The New Testament most plainly teaches this doctrine.

(1.) I begin with the text, where it is expressly asserted, There are three that bear record, &c. Here are three witnesses, and therefore three persons. Not three names of one person: for if a person have ever so many names, he is still but one witness. Not three Gods, but one.

(2.) In the baptism of Christ, Matth. 3:16, 17 mention is made of the Father speaking in an audible voice, the Son in the human nature baptized by John, and the Holy Ghost appearing in the shape of a dove; plainly importing three divine persons.

(3.) This appears from our baptism, Matth. 28:8, 19. 'Go ye and teach all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Observe the words, in the name, not names; which denotes, that these three are one God: and yet they are distinctly reckoned three in number, and so are three distinct persons.

(4.) It appears from the apostolical benediction, where all blessings are sought from the three persons distinctly mentioned, 2 Cor. 13:14. 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.'

III. That these three are distinct persons, (for though they cannot be divided, yet they are distinguished), is evident. For the Son is distinct from the Father 'being the express image of his person,' Heb. 1:2.; and in John 8:17, 18 he reckons his Father one witness and himself another. And that the Holy Ghost is distinct from both, appears from John 14:16, 17. 'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever: even the Spirit of truth.' And the text is plain for the distinction of all the three. Now, they are distinguished by their order of subsisting, and their incommunicable personal properties. In respect of the order of subsistence, the Father is the first person, as the fountain of the Deity, having the foundation of personal subsistence in himself; the Son is the second person, and hath the foundation of personal subsistence from the Father; and the Holy Ghost is the third person, as having the foundation of personal subsistence from the Father and the Son. And so for their personal properties,

1. It is the personal property of the Father to beget the Son, Heb. 1:5, 6, 8. 'Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son. And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.—But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.' This cannot be ascribed either to the Son or Holy Ghost.

2. It is the property of the Son to be begotten of the Father, John 1:14, 18. 'We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.'

3. The property of the Holy Ghost is to proceed from the Father and the Son, John 15:26. 'When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.' In Gal. 4:6 he is called 'the Spirit of the Son;' and in Rom. 8:9. 'the Spirit of Christ.' He is said to 'receive all things from Christ,' John 16:14, 15.; to be 'sent by him,' John 15:26.: and to be 'sent by the Father in Christ's name,' John 14:26. All this plainly implies, that the Holy Spirit proceedeth both from the Father and the Son. This generation of the Son and Holy Ghost was from all eternity. For as God is from everlasting to everlasting, so must this generation and procession be: and to deny it, would be to deny the supreme and eternal Godhead of all the three glorious persons.

IV. I proceed to shew, that these three persons are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. To this end consider,

1. How express the text is, These three are one. When the apostle speaks of the unity of the earthly witnesses, ver. 8 he says, they 'agree in one,' acting in unity of consent or agreement only. But the heavenly witnesses are one, viz. in nature or essence. They are not only of a like nature or substance, but one and the same substance; and if so, they are and must be equal in all essential perfections, as power and glory.

2. There is but one true God, as was before proved, and there can be but one true God. Now, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are each of them the true God; and therefore they are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory. And this I shall prove by scripture testimony.

First, That the Father is true God, none that acknowledge a God do deny. Divine worship and attributes are ascribed to him. But,

Secondly, That the Son is true God, appears if ye consider,

1. The scriptures expressly calls him God, Rom. 9:5. John 1:1. Acts 20:28.; 'the true God' 1 John 5:20.; 'the great God,' Tit. 2:13.; the 'mighty God, Isa. 9:6. 'Jehovah or Lord,' Mal. 3:1. which is a name proper to the true God only, Psal. 83 ult.

2. The attributes of God, which are one and the same with God himself, are ascribed to him; as eternity, Micah 5:2. 'Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting; independence and omnipotence, Rev. 1:8.—'The Almighty;' omnipresence, John 3:13 where he is said to be 'in heaven,' when bodily on earth; and Matth. 28:20. 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world:' omniscience, John 21:17. 'Lord thou knowest all things,' says Peter to him; and unchangeableness, Heb. 1:11, 12. 'They shall perish, but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.'

3. The works proper and peculiar to God are ascribed to him; as creation, John 1:3. 'All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.' Conservation of all things, Heb. 1:3.—'upholding all things by the word of his power,' Raising the dead by his own power, and at his own pleasure, John 5:21, 26. 'The Son quickeneth whom he will.' The Father 'hath given to the Son to have life in himself.' The saving of sinners, Hos. 1:7.—'I will save them by the Lord their God.' Compare chap. 13:4. 'in me is thine help.' Yea, whatsoever the Father doth, the Son doth likewise.

4. Divine worship is due to him, and therefore he is true God, Matth. 4:10. The angels are commanded to 'worship him,' Heb. 1:8. All must give the same honour to him as to the Father, John 5:23. We must have faith in him, and they are blessed that believe in him, Psal. 2:12 compare Jer. 17:5. We are to pray to him, Acts 7:58.; and we are baptised in his name, Matth. 28:19. Nay, he is expressly said to be 'equal with the Father,' Phil. 2:6 and 'one with him.' John 10:30. Now, seeing God will 'not give his glory to another,' Isa. 48:11 because he is true and cannot lie, and he is just, it follows, that

though Christ be a distinct person, yet he is not a distinct God from his Father, but one God with him, the same in substance equal in power and glory. And it is no contradiction to this doctrine when Christ says, 'My Father is greater than I,' John 14:28.; for he is not speaking there of his nature as God, but of his mediatory office; and hence he is called the Father's 'servant,' Is. 42:1.

Thirdly, That the Holy Ghost is true God, or a divine person, appears, if ye consider,

1. The scripture expressly calls him God, Acts 5:3, 4. 1 Cor. 3:16. Isa. 6:9 compared with Acts 28:25, 26. 2 Sam. 23:2, 3. He is called 'Jehovah, or the Lord,' Num. 12:6 compare 2 Pet. 1:21.

2. Divine attributes are ascribed to him; as omnipotence, he 'worketh all in all,' 1 Cor. 12:6, 9, 10, 11.; omnipresence, Psal. 139:7.; and omniscience, 1 Cor. 2:10.

3. Works peculiar to God are ascribed to him; as creation, Psal. 33:6; conservation, Psal. 104:30.; working miracles, Matt. 12:28.; raising the dead, Rom. 8:11.; inspiring the prophets, 2 Tim. 3:16 compare 2 Pet. 1:21.

4. Divine worship is due to him. We are baptised in his name, Matth. 28:19.; we are to pray to him, 2 Cor. 13:14. Acts 4:23, 25 compare 2 Sam. 23:2, 3.

Hence it appears,

1. That the Godhead is not divided, but that each of the three persons hath the one whole Godhead, or divine nature.

2. That it is sinful to imagine any inequality amongst the three divine persons, or to think one of them more honourable than another, seeing they are all one God.

V. I proceed to consider the weight and importance of this article. It is a fundamental article, the belief whereof is necessary to salvation. For those that are 'without God,' Eph. 2:12 and 'have not the Father,' cannot be saved; but 'whoso denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father,' 1 John 2:23. Those that are none of Christ's cannot be saved; but 'he that hath not the Spirit, is none of his,' Rom. 8:9. None receive the Spirit but those that know him. John 14:17. This mystery of the Trinity is so interwoven with the whole of religion, that their can neither be any true faith, right worship, or obedience without it. For take away this doctrine, and the object of faith, worship, and obedience is changed; seeing the object of these declared in the scripture, is the three persons in the Godhead; and the scriptures know no other God. Where is faith, if this be taken away? John 17:3. 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' Here it is to be observed, that our Lord does not call the Father only the true God, exclusive of the other persons of the Trinity; but that he (including the other persons who all subsist in the same one undivided essence) is the only true God, in opposition to idols, falsely called gods. 1 John 2:23. 'Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father.' There is no more true worship or fellowship with God in it: 'For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father,' Eph. 2:18. And there is no more obedience without it, John 15:23. 'He that hateth me,' says Christ, 'hateth my Father also.' John 5:23, 'He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.' We are debtors to the Spirit, to live after the Spirit, and are bound by baptism to the obedience of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

I shall conclude with a few inferences.

1. How much ought we to prize divine revelation, wherein we have a discovery of this incomprehensible mystery! This is a truth which nature's light could never have found out. It is above reason, though not contrary to it; for reason, though it could never have brought it to light, yet when it is discovered, it must needs yield to it; for as the

judgment of sense must be corrected by reason, so the judgment of reason by faith.

2. See here that God whom you are to take for your God, to love, trust in, worship and obey, even the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. This is that God who offers himself to you in the gospel, and whom you are to take for your God in Christ. This is that Father who elected a select company of sinners unto salvation; this is that Son that redeemed them unto God by his blood; and this is that Spirit that renews and sanctifies them, making them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

3. Lastly, Take this Father for your Father, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and be obedient children, if ye would be reckoned of his seed. Receive the Son, and slight him not. Give your consent to the gospel-offer, seeing it is your Maker that offers to be your husband. And grieve not the Holy Spirit, lest ye be found fighters against God.

OF THE DECREES OF GOD

EPHES. 1:11.—According to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

THE apostle here gives an instance of the sovereign freedom of divine grace through Jesus Christ in the believing Jews.

1. There is here the high privilege they were advanced to, a right to the heavenly inheritance, which had been forfeited by the sin of man.
2. Through whom they had obtained it, in him; by virtue of the merits, the obedience and satisfaction of Christ.

3. Why they obtained it, while others had not. Not that they were more worthy than others, but because they were predestinated, elected, or fore-ordained to salvation, and all the means of it.

4. There is the certainty of the efficacy of predestination. It is according to his purpose; that is, his firm purpose and peremptory decree to bring such things to pass. And this certainly in particular is evinced by a general truth, Who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will. Wherein we may notice.

(1.) God's effectual operation, he worketh. The word signifies to work powerfully and efficaciously, so as to overcome all contrary resistance, and all difficulties in the way; which is exactly God's way of working. And this working takes place in the works of creation and providence.

(2.) The manner how God works. The plan and scheme according to which his works are framed, is the counsel of his will. His will is his decree and intention; and it is called the counsel of his will, to denote the wisdom of his decrees, his most wise and free determination therein. As God's decree is an act of his will, and so most free, considered in relation to the creatures; so his decree and will are never without counsel; he willeth or decreeth things to be done with the greatest reason and judgment, most wisely as well as freely.

(3.) The object of his working after this manner, all things. This cannot be restricted to the blessings which the apostle had been speaking of immediately before, but must be understood of all things whatsoever, and of all their motions and actions as such; which therefore are the object of God's decrees.

The text plainly affords this doctrine, viz.

DOCT. 'God hath fore-ordained, according to the counsel of his own will, whatsoever comes to pass.'

Here I shall,

- I. Explain the nature of a decree.
- II. Consider the object of God's decrees.
- III. Speak of the end of his decrees.
- IV. Touch at their properties.
- V. Make improvement.

I. I am to explain the nature of a decree. The text calls it a purpose, a will. For God to decree is to purpose and fore-ordain, to will and appoint that a thing shall be or not be. And such decrees must needs be granted, seeing God is absolutely perfect, and therefore nothing can come to pass without his will; seeing there is an absolute and necessary dependence of all things and persons on God as the first cause. But there is a vast difference betwixt the decrees of God and men; whereof this is the principal: Men's purposes or decrees are distinct from themselves, but the decrees of God are not distinct from himself. God's decrees are nothing else but God himself, who is one simple act; and they are many only in respect of their objects, not as they are in God; even as the one heat of the sun melts wax and hardens clay. To say otherwise is to derogate from the absolute simplicity of God, and to make him a compound being. It is also to derogate from his infinite perfection; for whatsoever is added to any thing argues a want, which is made up by the accession of that thing, and so introduces a change; but God is absolutely unchangeable. Neither could God's decrees be eternal, if it were not so; for there is nothing eternal but God.

II. I proceed to consider the object of God's decrees. This is whatsoever comes to pass. He worketh all things, says the text. God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass; and nothing comes to pass but what he has decreed to come to pass. We may consider the extent of the divine decree under the three following heads.

1. God has decreed the creation of all things that have a being.

2. He has decreed to rule and govern the creatures which he was to make.

3. He has decreed the eternal state of all his rational creatures.

First, God decreed to rear up this stately fabric of the world, the heavens and the earth, the sea and the land, with all the great variety of creatures which inhabit them. There are myriads of holy angels in heaven, cherubim and seraphim, thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, angels and archangels. There are many shining luminaries in the firmament, the sun, and the moon, and innumerable glittering stars. There is a great variety of creatures on the earth, animals, plants, trees, and minerals, with various forms, shapes, colours, smells, virtues, and qualities. The sea is inhabited by many creatures, Psal. 104:25. Now, God decreed to make all these things, Rev. 4:11. 'Thou hast created all things.'

Secondly, God hath decreed the government of all his creatures. He preserves and upholds them in their beings, and he guides and governs them in all their motions and actions. He is not only the general spring and origin of all the motions and actions of the creatures, but he appoints and orders them all immediately.

1. He has decreed all their motions and actions: 'For (says the apostle) of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.' Rom. 11 ult. This is clear from God's knowing all these things before they come to pass; which knowledge of them must needs be in the decree, upon which the coming to pass of all things depends.

Not only good things, but evil things fall within the compass of his holy decree. Evils of punishment are truly good, being the execution of justice, as it is good in a magistrate to punish evildoers. God owns himself to be the author of these evils, Amos 3:6. 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' And yet he has decreed the effecting of these. As for the evils of sin, these also fall within the compass of the decree of God, as is clear in the case of crucifying

Christ, Acts 2:23. 'Him (says the apostle to the Jews) being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.' And says the apostle, Acts 4:27, 28. 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.' This appears also in the case of Pharaoh refusing to let Israel go, and pursuing them when they had gone, whose heart God hardened, Exod. 14:4; and in the sin of Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt; of which Joseph says, Gen. 45:8. 'So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.' It is true, God decreed not the effecting of sin, for then he should have been the author of it, but he decreed the permission of sin. And though sin in itself is evil, yet God's permitting it is good, seeing he can bring good out of it; and it is just in him to permit it, where he is not bound to hinder it. Yet this is not a naked permission, whereby the thing may either come to pass or not, but such as infers a certainty of the event, so that in respect of the event the sin cannot but come to pass. Hence our Lord says, Matth. 18:7. 'Wo unto the world because of offences;. for it must needs be that offences come.' And says the apostle, 1 Cor. 11:19. 'There must be heresies among you.' See also Acts 4:27, 28 forecited.

2. And not only necessary things, as the burning of the fire, but the most free acts of the creature, and the most casual things, fall under the divine decree. Free acts, as Prov. 20:1. 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.' To this purpose are the foresaid instances of the Jews, Pharaoh, and Joseph's brethren.—The most casual, as in the case of the casual slaughter mentioned, Exod. 21:12, 13, and Deut. 19:3 where mention is made of the Lord's delivering the person slain into the hands of the slayer, though he had no intention to slay him. Such also is the case of lots, Prov. 16:33. 'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.' This holds also in the case of sparrows, and the hairs of the head falling, which cannot be done

without God, Matth. 10:29, 30. And thus not only great things, but small things fall within the compass of the divine decree.

But more especially let us consider God's decrees with respect to the government of rational creatures. This we may take up in the following particulars.

1. God has decreed what kingdoms and monarchies should be on the earth, what princes and potentates should rule and govern them, and whether their government should be mild or tyrannical; how long each kingdom should continue, when they should have peace and when war, when prosperity and adversity. We find wonderful discoveries made to Daniel with respect to these things.

2. God has decreed every thing relating to the lot and condition of particular persons.

- (1.) He has decreed the time and place of their birth, whether it should be under the law or gospel, in a land of light or darkness; whether among the savage Indians in America, or among the more polite and civilized people of Europe; whether among Mahometans, Papists, or Protestants. All this was decreed by the Lord, who 'hath made of one blood all nations of men, to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation,' Acts 17:26.

- (2.) He hath decreed every man's lot and condition, whether it shall be high or low, rich or poor, noble or ignoble, learned or unlearned. He hath determined the trade and employment they should follow, the particular business they should betake themselves to. Many times God's providence over-rules men's purposes and designs, for fulfilling his own counsels. Matters are sometimes strangely wheeled about, so that not what we or our parents designed, but what God hath purposed shall take place. Amos was meanly employed at first, but God designed him for a more honourable calling: he was taken from the office of a herdman, and gatherer of sycamore fruit, and

invested with a commission to prophesy to the people of Israel, Amos 7:14, 15. David followed the ewes, and it is like never raised his thoughts to higher things in the days of his youth; but God made him the royal shepherd of a better flock, Psal. 78:70, 71. The most part of the apostles were fishermen; but Christ called them to a more high and eminent station, even to be extraordinary officers in his church, and fishers of men.

(3.) God hath decreed what relations men shall have in the world. Their wives and children are appointed for them. Hence said Abraham's servant, Gen. 24:44. 'Let the same be the woman whom the Lord hath appointed for my master's son.' That such a woman rather than any other, should be wife, to such a man, is by the appointment of Heaven. Men's children are also decreed by God. Hence said Eve, Gen. 4:24. 'God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.' And says the Psalmist, Psal. 127:3. 'Lo children are the heritage of the Lord.' God determines the numbers and names of every man's children.

(4.) All the comforts of men's lives are under the divine appointment, both those temporal and spiritual. Hence says the prophet, Isa. 26:1. 'We have a strong city: salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.'

(5.) All men's afflictions are determined by a decree of Heaven, Micah 6:9. 'Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.' Such are public calamities and distresses, as war, famine and pestilence, all bodily pains and sickness, poverties and pinching straits, and whatever is grievous and afflictive to men. None of these spring out of the dust, or come by chance. The kind and nature of people's troubles, their measure and degree, time and season, continuance and duration, and all the circumstances of them, are determined, and weighed in the scale of his eternal counsel. Hence says the apostle, 1 Thess. 3:3. 'No man should be moved by these afflictions: for you yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.'

(6.) The time of every man's life in the world is appointed. Hence says Job, chap. 7:1. 'Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? are not his days also like the days of an hireling?' And says the same great man, chap. 14:5. 'His days are determined: and the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.' The term of our life is fixed and limited, our days are determined, and our months numbered. Hence David prays, Psal. 39:4. 'Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am.' Our days are measured; they are as the days of an hireling. As the hireling hath a set time to work in, so every man and woman hath an appointed time for acting and working in this world. We are all pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and in a little time we must go hence and be no more. We are here like men upon a stage to act our parts, and in a short time we must retire within the curtain of death, and others will come in our room. Our glass is continually running, and the day and hour in which it will run out is settled and fixed by the order of Heaven. We find in scripture that God hath often foretold the precise term of particular men's lives. He set a hundred and twenty years to those who lived in the old world before the flood came upon them, Gen. 6:3. He foretold the time of Moses' life, of that of Jeroboam's son, of that of Ahaziah king of Israel, and of many others. All this was from his own decree and counsel.

Thirdly, God hath determined the eternal state of all his rational creatures, both men and angels. Our Confession of Faith tells us, agreeably to scripture, chap. 3 art. 3 that 'by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others are fore-ordained to everlasting death.' More particularly,

1. We read of the elect angels, 1 Tim. 5:21. The perseverance and standing of the holy angels in the state of their primitive integrity, and their confirmation therein, was determined by the purpose of God. In the morning of the creation heaven shined with innumerable glittering stars, the angels of light, of whom a vast number are, by

their rebellion against God, become wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. Now, the good angels are in a supernatural state, without the least danger of change, or any separation from the blessed presence of God in glory, flowing from the continual irradiations of divine grace, which preserves their minds from errors, and their wills from irregular desires; and consequently they cannot sin, nor forfeit their felicity.

It was by an eternal decree of God, that he passed by the angels that fell, and doomed them to everlasting misery. The apostle tells us, 2 Pet. 2:4 that 'God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved into judgment.' And saith Jude, ver. 6. 'The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.' Mercy did not interpose to avert or suspend their judgment; but immediately they were expelled from the Divine Presence. Their present misery is insupportable, and worse awaits them. Their judgment is irreversible; they are under the blackness of darkness for ever. They have not the least glimpse of hope to allay their sorrows, and no star-light to sweeten the horrors of their eternal night. It were a kind of mercy to them to be capable of death; but God will never be so far reconciled to them as to annihilate them. Immortality, which is the privilege of their nature, infinitely increases their torment.

2. God hath likewise appointed the final and eternal state of men and women. It is said, Rom. 9:21, 22, 23. 'Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?'

(1.) He hath elected some to everlasting life by an irreversible decree, Rom. 8:29, 30. 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.' Eph. 1:4. 'According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.' 2 Thess. 2:13. (God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.' From eternity God elected some from among the lost posterity of Adam to everlasting life and glory, according to the good pleasure of his own will. Therefore all is referred by our Saviour to the good pleasure of God, Matth. 11:25, 26. And all the means for accomplishing the ends of election are likewise of divine appointment; particularly the redemption of ruined sinners by the death and sufferings of Christ: 'He hath chosen us in Christ,' Eph. 1:4. The Father did first, in the order of nature, chuse Christ to the Mediatory office, and as the chief corner-stone to bear up the whole building; whence he is called God's elect, Isa. 42:1. And then he chose a company of lost sinners to be saved by and through Christ; and therefore he is said to predestinate them to be conformed to the image of his Son.

(2.) God hath passed by the rest of mankind, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, and hath ordained them to dishonour and wrath for their sins, to the praise of his glorious justice. Hence Christ is said to be 'a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence to them that stumble at the word being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed,' 1 Pet. 2:8. 'The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold, and of silver, but also of wood, and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour,' 2 Tim. 2:19, 20. In Jude, ver. 4 we read of 'ungodly men, who were before of old ordained to condemnation.' And in Rom. 9:22, 23 we

read of 'vessels of mercy, which God had afore prepared unto glory: and of vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.'

III. I come to consider the end of God's decrees. And this is no other than his own glory. Every rational agent acts for an end; and God being the most perfect agent, and his glory the highest end, there can be no doubt but all his decrees are directed to that end. 'For—to him are all things,' Rom. 11:36. 'That we should be to the praise of his glory,' Eph. 1:12. In all, he aims at his glory: and seeing he aims at it, he gets it even from the most sinful actions he has decreed to permit. Either the glory of his mercy or of his justice he draws therefrom. Infinite wisdom directs all to the end intended. More particularly,

1. This was God's end in the creation of the world. The divine perfections are admirably glorified here, not only in regard of the greatness of the effect, which comprehends the heavens and the earth, and all things therein; but in regard of the marvellous way of its production. For he made the vast universe without the concurrence of any material cause; he brought it forth from the womb of nothing by an act of his efficacious will. And as he began the creation by proceeding from nothing to real existence, so in forming the other parts he drew them from infirm and indisposed matter, as from a second nothing, that all his creatures might bear the signatures of infinite power. Thus he commanded light to arise out of darkness, and sensible creatures from an insensible element. The lustre of the divine glory appears eminently here. Hence says David, Psal. 19:1. 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' They declare and manifest to the world the attributes and perfections of their great Creator, even in his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. All the creatures have some prints of God stamped upon them, whereby they loudly proclaim and shew to the world his wisdom and goodness in framing them. Hence says Paul, Rom. 1:20. 'The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.'

2. The glory of God was his chief end and design in making men and angels. The rest of the creatures glorified God in an objective way, as they are evidences and manifestations of his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. But this higher rank of beings are endued with rational faculties, and so are capable to glorify God actively. Hence it is said, Prov. 16:4. 'The Lord hath made all things for himself.' If all things were made for him, then man and angels especially, who are the master-pieces of the whole creation. We have our rise and being from the pure fountain of God's infinite power and goodness; and therefore we ought to run towards that again, till we empty all our faculties and excellencies into that same ocean of divine goodness.

3. This is likewise the end of election and predestination. For 'he hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children, to the praise of the glory of his grace.' That some are ordained to eternal life, and others passed by, and suffered to perish eternally in their sin, is for the manifestation of the infinite perfections and excellencies of God. The glory and beauty of the divine attributes is displayed here with a shining lustre; as his sovereign authority and dominion over all his creatures to dispose of them to what ends and purposes he pleaseth; his knowledge and omniscience, in beholding all things past, present, and to come; his vindictive justice, in ordaining punishments to men, as a just retribution for sin; and his omnipotence, in making good his word, and putting all his threatenings in execution. The glory of his goodness shines likewise here, in making choice of any, when all most justly deserved to be rejected. And his mercy shines here with an amiable lustre, in receiving and admitting all who believe in Jesus into his favour.

4. This was the end that God proposed in that great and astonishing work of redemption. In our redemption by Christ we have the fullest, clearest, and most delightful manifestation of the glory of God that ever was or shall be in this life. All the declarations and manifestations that we have of his glory in the works of creation and common providence, are but dim and obscure in comparison with what is here. Indeed the glory of his wisdom, power, and goodness, is

clearly manifested in the works of creation. But the glory of his mercy and love had lain under an eternal eclipse without a Redeemer. God had in several ages of the world pitched upon particular seasons to manifest and discover one or other particular property of his nature. Thus his justice was declared in his drowning the old world with a deluge of water, and burning Sodom with fire from heaven. His truth and power were clearly manifested in freeing the Israelites from the Egyptian chains, and bringing them out from that miserable bondage. His truth was there illustriously displayed in performing a promise which had lain dormant for the space of 430 years, and his power in quelling his implacable enemies by the meanest of his creatures. Again, the glory of one attribute is more seen in one work than in another: in some things there is more of his goodness, in other things more of his wisdom is seen, and in others more of his power. 'But in the work of redemption all his perfections and excellencies shine forth in their greatest glory. And this is the end that God proposed in their conversion and regeneration. Hence it is said, Isa. 43:21. 'This people have I formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise.' Sinners are adopted into God's family, and made a royal priesthood on this very design,' 1 Pet. 2:9.

IV. I come now to consider the properties of God's decrees.

1. They are eternal. God makes no decrees in time, but they were all from eternity. So the decree of election is said to have been 'before the foundation of the world,' Eph. 1:4. Yea whatever he doth in time, was decreed by him, seeing it was known to him before time, Acts 15:18. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning.' And this foreknowledge is founded on the decree. If the divine decrees were not eternal, God would not be most perfect and unchangeable, but, like weak man, should take new counsels, and would be unable to tell every thing that were to come to pass.

2. They are most wise, 'according to the counsel of his will.' God cannot properly deliberate or take counsel, as men do; for he sees all things together and at once. And thus his decrees are made with

perfect judgment, and laid in the depth of wisdom, Rom. 11:33. 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God I how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' So that nothing is determined that could have been better determined.

3. They are most free, according to the counsel of his own will; depending on no other, but all flowing from the mere pleasure of his own will, Rom. 11:34. 'For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?' Whatsoever he decreeth to work without himself, is from his free choice. So his decrees are all absolute, and there are none of them conditional. He has made no decrees suspended on any condition without himself. Neither has he decreed any thing because he saw it would come to pass, or as that which would come to pass on such or such conditions; for then they should be no more according to the counsel of his will, but the creature's will. For God's decrees being eternal, cannot depend upon a condition which is temporal. They are the determinate counsels of God, but a conditional decree determines nothing. Such conditional decrees are inconsistent with the infinite wisdom of God, and are in men only the effects of weakness; and they are inconsistent with the independency of God, making them depend on the creature.

4. They are unchangeable. They are the unalterable laws of heaven. God's decrees are constant; and he by no means alters his purpose, as men do, Psal. 33:11. 'The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.' Hence they are compared to mountains of brass, Zech. 6:1. As nothing can escape his first view, so nothing can be added to his knowledge. Hence Balaam said, 'God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?' Numb. 23:19. The decree of election is irreversible: The foundation of God, (says the apostle), standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his,' 2 Tim. 2:19.

5. They are most holy and pure. For as the sun darts its beams upon a dunghill, and yet is no way defiled by it; so God decrees the permission of sin, as above explained, yet is not the author of sin: 1 John 1:5. 'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all,' Jam. 1:13, 17. 'God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'

6. Lastly, They are effectual; that is, whatsoever God decrees comes to pass infallibly, Isa. 46:10. 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' He cannot fall short of what he has determined. Yet the liberty of second causes is not hereby taken away; for the decree of God offers no violence to the creature's will; as appears from the free and unforced actings of Joseph's brethren, Pharoah, the Jews that crucified Christ, &c. Nor does it take away the contingency of second causes, either in themselves or as to us, as appears by the lot cast into the lap. Nay they are thereby established, because he hath efficaciously foreordained that such effects shall follow on such causes.

Before proceeding to the application of this doctrine, it may not be improper to answer some objections which are brought against the doctrine of the divine decrees.

1. It is objected by some, that if all things that come to pass in time be appointed of God by an irreversible decree, then this seems to make God the author of sin, as if he had ordained that horrid and hateful evil to come into the world, which is so dishonourable to himself, and so destructive to the children of men. In answer to this, you must know,

1. That all sinful actions fall under the divine decree. Though sin itself flows from transgressing the law, yet the futuration of it is from the decree of God. No such thing could ever have been in the world, if it had not been determined by the eternal counsel of Heaven for a holy and just end. This is plainly asserted by the apostle Peter, with respect to the greatest villainy that was ever committed on the earth,

namely, the death and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, at the hands of sinful men, Acts 2:23 forecited. And the church gives this account of it, Acts 4:27, 28. 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand, and thy counsel determined before to be done.' There was never such an atrocious crime or higher act of wickedness committed, than the murdering of the Lord of glory. And yet it appears from these texts of scripture, that, in this bloody and horrid scene, wicked men did no more than God's hand and counsel determined before to be done.

2. That the decree of God is properly distinguished into that which is effective, and that which is permissive.

(1.) His effective decree respects all the good that comes to pass, whether it be moral or natural goodness. All the actions and motions of the creatures have a natural goodness in them; and even sinful actions considered abstractly from any irregularity, obliquity, or deformity cleaving to them, have a natural goodness in them, so far as they are actions: they have a goodness of being considered purely and simply as actions. Now, God has decreed to effect all these, yea even sinful actions considered purely as natural. For he is the first and universal cause of all things, the fountain and original of all good. And it is said with respect to the oppressions of the church by wicked men, Psal. 115:3. 'Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased.'

(2.) His permissive decree doth only respect the irregularity and pravity that is in sinful actions. God decreed to permit the same, or he determined it to be, himself permitting it. Hence it is said, Acts 14:16. 'In times past he suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.' And God doth nothing in time, but what he did from eternity decree to do. So that the futuration of sin is from the decree of God. God determined that it should be. He did not decree to have any efficiency in sin, considered as such; but he willed that it should be

done, himself permitting it. The counsel of God did not determine to do it, but that it should be done.

3. God decreed the permission of sin for great and glorious ends. It is true, sin in its own nature has no tendency to any good end. If it end in any good, it is from the overruling providence of God, and that infinite divine skill that can bring good out of evil, as well as light out of darkness. Now, the great and glorious end for which God decreed the after-being of sin, is his own glory: and the ends subordinate thereunto are not a few. Particularly, God decreed the futuration of sin, (1.) That he might have occasion of glorifying his infinite wisdom, love, and grace in the redemption and salvation of a company of lost sinners through the death and sufferings of his own dear Son. (2.) That his patience and long suffering in bearing with and forbearing sinners, might be magnified, admired, and adored. (3.) That he might be honoured and glorified by the faith and repentance of his people, and their walking humbly with him. (4.) That his justice might be illustriously displayed and glorified in the eternal damnation of reprobate sinners for their own sins and abominations, sin being the cause of their damnation, though not of their reprobation. Thus God decreed the futuration of sin for these holy and wise ends, that he might glorify his wisdom in bringing good out of so great an evil, and a greater good than the evil he decreed to permit.

4. The decree of God about the permission of sin does not infringe the liberty of man's will. For sin doth not follow the decree by a necessity of co-action or compulsion, which indeed would destroy human liberty; but by a necessity of infallibility, which is very consistent with it. It is sufficient unto human liberty, or the freedom of man's will, that a man act without all constraint, and out of choice. Now, this is not taken away by the decree. Men sin as freely as if there were no decree, and yet as infallibly as if there were no liberty. And men sin, not to fulfil God's decree, which is hid from them, but to serve and gratify their vile lusts and corrupt affections.

Object. 2. If God hath determined the precise number of every man's days by an unalterable decree, then the use of means for the preservation of our health and lives is altogether unnecessary; for nothing can frustrate the divine decree. We will certainly live as long as God hath appointed us, whether we use any means or not. And therefore when we are hungry, we need not eat and drink; and when we are sick, we need not take physic, or use any medicines.

In answer to this, you must know, that as God hath decreed the end, so he hath decreed the means that are proper for attaining that end; so that these two must not be separated. Though God hath decreed how long we shall live, yet seeing it is his ordinary way to work by means, and he hath commanded and enjoined the use of them to men, therefore it is still our duty to use lawful means for preserving our life and health, and to wait on God in the due use of them, referring the event to his wise determination. In Paul's dangerous voyage to Rome, an angel of the Lord assured him, that God had given him all that sailed with him in the ship; and Paul assured them from the Lord, that there should be no loss of any of their lives: yet when some were about to flee out of the ship, he says to the centurion who had the command, 'Except these abide in the ship, you cannot be saved,' Acts 27:31. And he exhorted them to take some meat after their long abstinence, telling them, that it was for their health. From which it plainly appears, that as God had decreed to save their lives, so he had decreed to save them in the due use of ordinary means; so that they were to use means for the preservation of their life and health. And when Hezekiah was recovered from a mortal disease, and received a promise from God that he should have fifteen years added to his days, and the promise was confirmed by a sign, the miraculous going back of the sun, he did not neglect or cast off the use of means: but, as was prescribed by the prophet, he applied a bunch of dried figs to his sore, and used still his ordinary diet. Therefore it is gross ignorance and madness in men to reason so against God's decrees. The Lord, by an unchangeable counsel and purpose, hath decreed and set down all things, and how they shall come to pass; and therefore it is a wrong way of arguing for people to

say, If God hath determined how long I shall live, then I shall not die sooner, though I never eat or drink.

Object. 3. If God hath determined the eternal state and condition of men, whether they shall be happy or miserable for ever, then it is in vain to repent and believe, or use any means for their own safety. For if God hath elected them to salvation, they shall certainly be saved, whether they use any means or not; and if they are not elected to everlasting life, all that they can possibly do will be to no purpose at all, for they shall never be saved by it.

For answer to this, you must know,

1. That God's decree of election is a great secret, which we ought not to pry into. It is simply impossible for men to know whether they are elected or not, before they believe. Indeed, if a man were certain that he is not elected to eternal life, it would be another case: but as it is not certain that thou art elected, so it is not certain that thou art not elected. You have no means to know either the one or the other certainly, till you get saving faith. Till then the Lord reserves it in his own breast, as a secret which we are not to pry into. For it is said, Deut. 29:29. 'Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children, that we may do all the things of his law.' Here the Lord shews what belongs to him and what belongs to us, and that we should mind our duty, and not busy and perplex ourselves about impertinencies. Whether men be elected or not elected, is a secret that God never discloses to an unbeliever; but that we should believe on Christ is no secret. This is a duty clearly revealed and enjoined by the gospel.

2. It is our duty to look to God's commands, and not to his decrees; to our own duty, and not to his purposes. The decrees of God are a vast ocean, into which many possibly have curiously pried to their own horror and despair; but few or none have ever pried into them to their own profit and satisfaction. Our election is not written in particular in the word of God; but our duty is plainly set down there.

If men conscientiously perform their duty, this is the way to come to the knowledge of their election. Men therefore should not question whether they be elected or not, but first believe on Christ, and endeavour diligently to work out their own salvation; and if their works be good, and their obedience true, thereby they will come to a certain knowledge that they were elected and set apart to everlasting life.

3. As God elects to the end, so he elects also to the means. Now, faith and obedience are the means and way to salvation; and therefore, if you be elected to salvation, you are also elected to faith and obedience. See what is said to this purpose, 2 Thess. 2:13. 'God hath chosen you to salvation,' there is the end; 'through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth,' there is the means which lead to that end. Both are decreed by God. If therefore you heartily and sincerely believe and obey, then your election to salvation stands firm and sure. Nay, further, the scriptures make election to be terminated as well in obedience as salvation. So 1 Pet. 1:2. 'Elect (says the apostle) unto obedience, through sanctification of the Spirit.' In the former place it was, 'elect to salvation through sanctification;' but here it is, 'elect to obedience through sanctification;' to denote unto us, that none are elected unto salvation but those that are elected unto obedience. And therefore it is unreasonable, yea, it is contradictory to say, if I am elected, I shall be saved, whether I believe and obey or not; for none are elected to salvation but through faith and obedience.

4. Men do not pry into the decrees of God in other things, but do what they know to be incumbent upon them as their duty. And certainly it is as unreasonable here. When you are dangerously sick, and the physician tells you, that unless you take such and such medicines, your case is desperate; you do not use to reason thus, Then if God hath decreed my recovery, I will certainly be restored to my health, whether I take that course of physic or not; but you presently fall in with the advice given you, and make use of the means prescribed for your health. And will you not do so here? you

are dangerously sick and mortally wounded with sin, and God commands you to flee to Christ the only physician that can cure you, and cast yourselves upon him, and you shall certainly be saved. But O, says the sinner, if I knew that God had decreed my salvation, I would venture on Christ; but till once I know this, I must not believe: O how unreasonable is unbelief! The devil's suggestions make poor creatures act as if they were entirely distracted and out of their wits. This is just as if an Israelite stung with the fiery serpents should have said, If I knew that the Lord had decreed my cure, I would look upon the brazen serpent, and if he hath decreed it, I will certainly recover whether I look to it or not. If all the stung Israelites had been thus resolved, it is likely they had all perished. Or this is as if one pursued by the avenger of blood, should have set himself down in the way to the city of refuge, where he should have been flying for his life, and said, If God hath decreed my escape, then I will be safe whether I run to the city of refuge or not; but if he hath not decreed it, then it is in vain for me to go thither. Now, would not men count this a wilful casting away of his life, with a careless neglect of that provision which God hath made to save it? Was it not sufficient that a way was made for his escape, and a way feasible enough, the city of refuge being always open? Thus the arms of Christ are always open to receive and embrace poor humbled perishing sinners fleeing to him for help. And will men destroy themselves by suffering Satan to entangle them with a needless, impertinent, and unreasonable scruple? In other cases, if there be no way but one, and any encouraging probability to draw men into it, they run into it without delay, not perplexing and discouraging themselves with the decrees of God. Now, this is thy case, O sinner; Christ is the way, the truth, and the life; there is no other by whom you can be saved; flee to him then as for thy life; and let not Satan hinder thee, by diverting thee to impossibilities and impertinencies. Comply with the call and offer of the gospel. This is present and pertinent duty, and trouble not thyself about the secrets of God.

I conclude all with a few inferences.

1. Has God decreed all things that come to pass? Then there is nothing that falls out by chance, nor are we to ascribe what we meet with either to good or ill luck and fortune. There are many events in the world which men look upon as mere accidents, yet all these come by the counsel and appointment of Heaven. Solomon tells us, Prov. 16:33 that 'the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is from the Lord.' However casual and fortuitous things may be with respect to us, yet they are all determined and directed by the Lord. When that man drew a bow at a venture, 1 Kings 22:34 it was merely accidental with respect to him, yet it was God that guided the motion of the arrow so as to smite the king of Israel rather than any other man. Nothing then comes to pass, however casual and uncertain it may seem to be, but what was decreed by God.

2. Hence we see God's certain knowledge of all things that happen in the world, seeing his knowledge is founded on his decree. As he sees all things possible in the glass of his own power, so he sees all things to come in the glass of his own will; of his effecting will, if he hath decreed to produce them; and of his permitting will, if he hath decreed to suffer them. Hence his declaration of things to come is founded on his appointing them, Isa. 44:7. 'Who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming and shall come? let them shew unto them.' He foreknows the most necessary things according to the course of nature, because he decreed that such effects should proceed from and necessarily follow such and such causes: and he knows all future contingents, all things which shall fall out by chance, and the most free actions of rational creatures, because he decreed that such things should come to pass contingently or freely, according to the nature of second causes. So that what is casual or contingent with respect to us, is certain and necessary in regard of God.

3. Whoever be the instruments of any good to us, of whatever sort, we must look above them, and eye the hand and counsel of God in it, which is the first spring, and be duly thankful to God for it. And

whatever evil of crosses or afflictions befalls us, we must look above the instruments of it to God. Affliction doth not rise out of the dust or come to men by chance; but it is the Lord that sends it, and we should own and reverence his hand in it. So did David in the day of his extreme distress. 2 Sam. 16:11. 'Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.' We should be patient under whatever distress befalls us, considering that God is our party, Job 2:10. 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?' This would be a happy means to still our quarreling at adverse dispensations. Hence David says, 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it,' Psal 39:9.

4. See here the evil of murmuring and complaining at our lot in the world. How apt are ye to quarrel with God, as if he were in the wrong when his dealings with you are not according to your own desires and wishes? You demand a reason, and call God to an account, Why am I thus? why so much afflicted and distressed? why so long afflicted? and why such an affliction rather than another? why am I so poor and another so rich? Thus your hearts rise up against God. But you should remember, that this is to defame the counsels of infinite wisdom, as if God had not ordered your affairs wisely enough in his eternal counsel. We find the Lord reproving Job for this, chap. 40:2. 'shall he that contendeth with the Lord instruct him?' When ye murmur and repine under cross and afflictive dispensations, this is a presuming to instruct God how to deal with you, and to reprove him as if he were in the wrong. Yea, there is a kind of implicit blasphemy in it, as if you had more wisdom and justice to dispose of your lot, and to carve out your own portion in the world. This is upon the matter the language of such a disposition, Had I been on God's counsel, I had ordered this matter better; things had not been with me as now they are. O presume not to correct the infinite wisdom of God, seeing he has decreed all things most wisely and judiciously.

5. There is no reason for people to excuse their sins and falls, from the doctrine of the divine decrees. Wicked men, when they commit some villainy or atrocious crime, are apt to plead thus for their

excuse, Who can help it? God would have it so; it was appointed for me before I was born, so that I could not avoid it. This is a horrid abuse of the divine decrees, as if they did constrain men to sin: Whereas the decree is an immanent act of God, and so can have no influence, physical or moral upon the wills of men, but leaves them to the liberty and free choice of their own hearts; and what sinners do, they do most freely and of choice. It is a horrid and detestable wickedness to cast the blame of your sin upon God's decree. This is to charge your villainy upon him, as if he were the author of it. It is great folly to cast your sins upon Satan who tempted you, or upon your neighbour who provoked you; but it is a far greater sin, nay horrid blasphemy, to cast it upon God himself. A greater affront than this cannot be offered to the infinite holiness of God.

6. Lastly, Let the people of God comfort themselves in all cases by this doctrine of the divine decrees; and, amidst whatever befalls them, rest quietly and submissively in the bosom of God, considering that whatever comes or can come to pass, proceeds from the decree of their gracious friend and reconciled Father, who knows what is best for them, and will make all things work together for their good. O what a sweet and pleasant life would ye have under the heaviest pressures of affliction, and what heavenly serenity and tranquillity of mind would you enjoy, would you cheerfully acquiesce in the good will and pleasure of God, and embrace every dispensation, how sharp soever it may be, because it is determined and appointed for you by the eternal counsel of his will!

OF THE WORK OF CREATION

HEB. 11:3.—Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

HAVING discoursed to you of the decrees of God, whereby he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass, I come now to treat of the execution of these decrees. That question, 'How doth God execute his decrees?' being only an introduction to what follows, it is needless to insist on it. Only you must know, that for God to execute his decrees, is to bring to pass what he has decreed. Now, what God from all eternity decreed is brought to pass in the works of creation and providence. Nothing falls out in either of these but what was decreed; nor does it fall out in any other way than as it was decreed. The decrees of God are as it were the scheme, draught and pattern of the house; and the works of creation and providence are the house, built in every point conformable to the draught.

In the text we have an answer to that question, 'What is the work of creation?' Wherein, we may consider,

1. What we understand about it. (1.) The making of the world; it was framed, and had a beginning, not being from eternity. (2.) The author and efficient cause of it, God. (3.) What God made, the worlds; all things, heaven, earth, sea, air, &c. and all the inhabitants thereof, angels, men, cattle, fowls, fishes, &c. (4.) How they were made, by the word of God, that word of power which spake all things, into being. Or it may denote Jesus Christ, who is called the word of God, and by whom God made the worlds. (5.) Whereof they were made. This is declared negatively, Things which are seen were not made of things which do appear, that is, not of pre-existent matter, but of nothing. By things that are seen may be understood visible corporeal things; and if these were made of nothing, much more things that are not seen. But I rather understand it of all things which are seen to have a being; for that word relates to the eyes of the understanding, as well as of the body.

2. How we understand this creation of the world, through faith. Not that we can understand nothing of the creation by the light of nature; for the eternity of the world is contrary to reason as well as faith; but we have the full and certain knowledge of this work of creation in the

particular circumstances of it, through faith assenting to divine revelation, and no other way.

In speaking to this work of creation I shall shew,

I. What we are to understand by creation.

II. That the world was made, or had a beginning.

III. Who made it.

IV. What God made.

V. Whereof all things were made.

VI. How they were made.

VII. In what space of time they were made.

VIII. For what end God made all things.

IX. In what case or condition he made them.

X. Deduce some inferences from the whole.

I. I am to show what we are to understand by creation, or what it is to create.

1. It is not to be taken here in a large sense, as sometimes it is used in scripture, for any production of things wherein second causes have their instrumentality; as when it is said, Psal. 104:30. 'Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.' Where the meaning is, thou sendest forth thy quickening power, which produceth life in the creatures from time to time: for the Psalmist speaks not here of the first creation, but of the continued and repeated production of living creatures, in which the divine power is the principal agent. But,

2. We are to take it strictly, for the production of things out of nothing, or the giving a being to things which had none before. And here you must know, that there is a twofold creation, one immediate, and the other mediate.

(1.) There is an immediate creation; as when things are brought forth out of pure nothing, where there was no pre-existent matter to work upon. Thus the heavens, the earth, the waters, and all the materials of inferior bodies, were made of nothing; and the souls of men are still produced from the womb of nothing by God's creative power, and infused into their bodies immediately by him, when they are fully organised to receive them.

(2.) There is a secondary and mediate creation, which is the making things of pre-existing matter, but of such as is naturally unfit and altogether indisposed for such productions, and which could never by any power of second causes be brought into such a form. Thus all beasts, cattle, and creeping things, and the body of man, were at first made of the earth, and the dust of the ground; and the body of the first woman was made of a rib taken out of the man. Now, this was a creation as well as the former; because, though there was matter here to work upon, yet it could never have been reduced into such a form without the efficacy of Almighty power. We have an account of both these in the history of the creation. It is said, Gen. 1:1. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth;' i. e, he made that mighty mass of matter out of nothing, which was at first a rude and indigested lump; for the earth was without form, and the heavens without light. And then by that same omnipotent power he reduced it into that beautiful order and disposition wherein it now appears to our view.

II. I go on to shew that the world was made, that it had a beginning and was not eternal. This the scripture plainly testifies, Gen. 1:1 above quoted. And this reason itself teacheth: for whatsoever is eternal, the being of it is necessary, and it is subject to no alteration.

But we see this is not the case with the world; for it is daily undergoing alterations.

III. I am next to shew who made the world, and gave it a beginning. That was God and he only, Gen. 1:1. 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' This will evidently appear from the following particulars.

1. The world could not make itself; for this would imply a horrid contradiction, namely, that the world was before it was; for the cause must always be before its effect. That which is not in being, can have no production; for nothing can act before it exists. As nothing hath no existence, so it hath no operation. There must therefore be something of real existence, to give a being to those things that are; and every second cause must be an effect of some other before it be a cause. To be and not to be at the same time, is a manifest contradiction, which would infallibly take place if any thing made itself. That which makes is always before that which is made, as is obvious to the most illiterate peasant. If the world were a creator, it must be before itself as a creature.

2. The production of the world could not be by chance. It was indeed the extravagant fancy of some ancient philosophers, that the original of the world was from a fortuitous concourse of atoms, which were in perpetual motion in an immense space, till at last a sufficient number of them met in such a happy conjunction as formed the universe in the beautiful order in which we now behold it. But it is amazingly strange how such a wild opinion, which can never be reconciled with reason, could ever find any entertainment in a human mind. Can any man rationally conceive, that a confused rout of atoms, of diverse natures and forms, and some so far distant from others, should ever meet in such a fortunate manner, as to form an entire world, so vast in the bigness, so distinct in the order, so united in the diversities of natures, so regular in the variety of changes, and so beautiful in the whole composure? Such an extravagant fancy as this can only possess the thoughts of a disordered brain.

3. God created all things, the world, and all the creatures that belong to it. He attributes this work to himself, as one of the peculiar glories of his Deity, exclusive of all the creatures. So we read, Isa. 44:24. 'I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself.' Chap. 45:12. 'I have made the earth, and created man upon it; I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded.' Chap. 40:12, 13. 'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? Job 9:8. 'Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.' These are magnificent descriptions of the creating power of God, and exceed every thing of the kind that hath been attempted by the pens of the greatest sages of antiquity.—By this operation God is distinguished from all the false gods and fictitious deities which the blinded nations adored, and shews himself to be the true God. Jer. 10:11, 12. 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.' Psal. 96:5. 'All the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens.' Isa. 37:19. 'Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.' None could make the world but God, because creation is a work of infinite power, and could not be produced by any finite cause: For the distance between being and not being is truly infinite, which could not be removed by any finite agent, or the activity of all finite agents united.

This work of creation is common to all the three persons in the adorable Trinity. The Father is described in scripture as the Creator, 1 Cor. 8:6.—'The Father, of whom are all things.' The same prerogative belongs to the Son, John 1:3. 'All things were made by him (the Word, the Son); and without him was not any thing made

that was made.' The same honour belongs to the Holy Ghost, as Job 26:13. 'By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens.' Chap. 33:4. 'The Spirit of God hath made me (says Elihu), and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.' All the three persons are one God; God is the Creator; and therefore all the external works and acts of the one God must be common to the three persons. Hence, when the work of creation is ascribed to the Father, neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit are excluded; but because, as the Father is the fountain of the Deity, so he is the fountain of divine works. The Father created from himself by the Son and the Spirit; the Son from the Father by the Spirit; and the Spirit from the Father and the Son; the manner or order of their working being according to the order of their subsisting. The matter may be conceived thus: All the three persons being one God, possessed of the same infinite perfections; the Father, the first in subsistence, willed the work of creation to be done by his authority: 'He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.'—In respect of immediate operation, it peculiarly belonged to the Son. For 'the Father created all things by Jesus Christ,' Eph. 3:9. And we are told, that 'all things were made by him,' John 3:3. This work in regard of disposition and ornament, doth peculiarly belong to the Holy Ghost. So it is said, Gen. 1:2. 'The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters,' to garnish and adorn the world, after the matter of it was formed. Thus it is also said, Job 26:13 above cited, 'By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens.'

IV. Our next province is to shew what God made. All things whatsoever, besides God, were created, Rev. 4:11. 'Thou hast created all things; and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' Col. 1:16. 'By him were all things created.' The evil of sin is no positive being, it being but a defect or want, and therefore is not reckoned among the things which God made, but owes its existence to the will of fallen angels and men. Devils being angels, are God's creatures; but God did not make them evil, or devils, but they made themselves so.

Those things that were made in the beginning were most properly created of God; but whatsoever is or will be produced in the world, is

still made by God, not only in respect that the matter whereof they are made was created by him, but because he is the first cause of all things, without whom second causes could produce nothing; and whatever power one creature has of producing another, is from God. Hence Elihu says, as above cited, 'The Spirit of God hath made me;' though he was produced by the operation of second causes. And it is worth while to consider what David says on this head, Psal. 139:13–16. This clearly appears from the impotency of the creature to produce any thing according to nature, when God denies his concurrence. Hence we have a chain of causes described, Hos. 2:21, 22 where God is the first cause, and acts the same part in all other operations wherein creatures are concerned: 'I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel.' If it be asked, then, what did God make? I answer, he made every thing that has a being, this stately structure of the universe, and that vast variety of creatures that are in it, sin only excepted, which he permitted should take place, but had no hand in the effecting of it as such.

V. I proceed to shew of what all things were made. Of nothing; which does not denote any matter of which they were formed, but the term from which God brought them; when they had no being he gave them one. There was no pre-existent matter to make them of, nothing at all to work upon: for he 'made all things both visible and invisible,' Col. 1:16. Rom. 11:36. If then he made all things, he must needs have made them of nothing, unless he would say there was, besides God, something before there was any thing, which is a palpable contradiction. To create is properly to make a thing of nothing, to make a thing have an existence that had none before. Thus were the heavens and the earth made of nothing simply; that is, they began to exist, which they never did before. This is what is called immediate creation, as I shewed on the first head. But there is a mediate creation, as I also noticed, which is a producing of things from matter altogether unfit for the work, and which could never be disposed, but by an almighty power to be such a thing? Thus man's

body was created of the dust, and this itself was created of nothing, and was utterly unfit for producing such a work without a superior agency.

VI. The sixth head is to shew, how all things were made of nothing. By the word of God's power. It was the infinite power of God that gave them a being; which power was exerted in his word, not a word properly spoken, but an act of his will commanding them to be, Gen. 1:3. God said, 'Let there be light and there was light,' Psal. 33:6, 9, 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made. He spake and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.' By his powerful word he called them from nothing to being, Rom. 4:17. 'God calleth those things which be not as though they were.' This is a notable evidence of infinite power, which with so great easiness as the speaking of a word, could raise up this glorious fabric of the world. An heathen philosopher considered this as a striking instance of the sublime, peculiar to the books of the Jewish legislator.

VII. Our next business is to shew in what space of time the world was created. It was not done in a moment, but in the space of six days, as is clear from the narrative of Moses. It was as easy for God to have done it in one moment as in six days. But this method he took, that we might have that wisdom, goodness, and power that appeared in the work, distinctly before our eyes, and be stirred up to a particular and distinct consideration of these works, for commemoration of which a seventh day is appointed a sabbath of rest.

But although God did not make all things in one moment, yet we are to believe, that every particular work was done in a moment, seeing it was done by a word, or an act of the divine will, Psal. 33:9 forecited. No sooner was the divine will intimated, than the thing willed instantly took place.

In the space of these six days the angels were created; and it is not to be thought that they were brought into being before that period; for the scripture expressly asserts, that all things were created in that

space, Exod. 20:11. And though Moses, Gen. 1 makes no express mention of the angels, yet, Gen. 2:1 he shews that they were created in one of these six days, as he mentions the host of the heavens and the earth; and it is certain, that in the host of heaven the angels are included, 1 Kings 22:19 where Micaiah the prophet says, 'I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven (which can be no other than the angels) standing by him.'

The works of the first day were, (1.) The highest heaven, the seat of the blessed, and that with the angels its inhabitants, who in Job 38:4–7 under the designation of 'morning stars and sons of God,' are said to have 'sang together, and shouted for joy,' when the foundations of the earth were laid, as being then made. (2.) The earth, that is, the mass of earth and water, which Moses says was without form and void; that is, without that beauty and order which it afterwards received, and destitute of inhabitants, and without furniture and use. (3.) The light, which was afterwards gathered together, and distributed into the body of the sun and stars.

The works of the second day were the firmament; that is, that expansion or vast space which extends itself from the surface of the earth to the utmost extremity of the visible heavens, which ver. 8. is called heaven, that is, the ærial heavens, the habitation of birds and fowls, through which they wing their way. This vast extension is called the firmament, because it is fixed in its proper place, without which it cannot be removed without force and violence. Another work of this day was the dividing of the waters above the firmament, that is, the clouds, from the waters as yet mixed with the earth, which were afterwards gathered together into seas, rivers, lakes, fountains, &c.

On the third day, the lower waters were gathered into certain hollow places, which formed the sea; and the dry land appeared, adorned with plants, trees, and herbs, which continue to be produced to this day.

On the fourth day, the sun, moon, and stars were made, to enlighten the world, and render it a beautiful place, which otherwise would have been an uncomfortable dungeon, and to distinguish the four seasons of the year.

On the fifth day, the fishes and fowls were made.

On the sixth day, all sorts of beasts, tame and wild, and creeping things were produced out of the earth; and last of all, man, male and female.

It is probable that the world was created in autumn, that season of the year in which generally things are brought to perfection for the use of man and beast. But this not being an article of faith, we need not insist upon it.

VIII. I come now to shew for what end God made all things. It was for his own glory, Prov. 16:4. 'The Lord hath made all things for himself,' Rom. 11:36. 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things.' And there are these three attributes of God that especially shine forth in this work of creation, namely, his wisdom, power, and goodness.

1. His wisdom eminently appears, (1.) In that after the heavens and their inhabitants were created, those things that have only being and not life, then those that have being and life, but not sense, then those that have being, life, and sense, but not reason, and last of all, man, having being, life, sense, and reason, were successively formed. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.' (2.) In his appointing of every thing to its proper use, by the law of creation, Gen. 1. Hence the wisdom of God is celebrated in that work, Jer. 10:12.' He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.'

2. The power of God appeared, (1.) In creating all things by a word, which instantly produced the effect intended. (2.) In that he created

plants, herbs, and trees, before the sun, moon, and stars, which now naturally are the causes of the earth's producing its fruits; as also light before them, for discovering their beauty and verdure.

3. His goodness appears, in that he first prepared the place before he brought in the inhabitants, first provided the food before the living creatures were made, and adorned and fitted all for the use of man, before he formed him.

IX. If it is asked, 'In what state were all things made? I answer, They were all very 'good,' Gen. 1:31. The goodness of the creature consists in its fitness for the use for which it was made. In this respect every thing answered exactly the end of its creation. Again, the goodness of things is their perfection; and so every thing was made agreeable to the idea thereof that was formed in the divine mind. There was not the least blemish or defect in the work; but every thing was beautiful, as it was the effect of infinite wisdom as well as almighty power. And God being the end of all, even natural things tend to him. (1.) Declaring his glory in an objective way, Psal. 19:1. (2.) Stirring us up to seek him, and behold him as our chief good and portion, Acts 17:26, 27. Rom. 1:20. (3.) Sustaining our life, and serving man, that he might serve God, for which he was made very fit, in regard of the rich endowments of his mind, all pure, holy, and upright, 1 Cor. 10:31. All the sin and misery that is now in the world, by which its beauty is greatly marred, its goodness defaced, and disorder and irregularity so universally prevail, proceeded from Satan, and man's yielding to his temptations.

I shall shut up this subject with a few inferences.

1. God is a most glorious being, infinitely lovely and desirable, possessed of every perfection and excellency. He made all things, and bestowed upon them all the perfections and amiable qualities with which they are invested. So that there is no perfection in any of the creatures which is not in him in an eminent way, Psal. 94:9. 'He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he

not see?' Whatever excellency and beauty is in the creatures, is all from him; and sure it must be most excellent in the fountain.

2. God's glory should be our chief end. And seeing whatever we have is from him, it should be used and employed for him: For 'all things were created by him and for him,' Col. 1:16. Have we a tongue? It should be employed for him, to shew forth his praise; hands? they should do and work for him; life? it should be employed in his service; talents and abilities? they should be laid out for promoting his interest and honour; and, upon a proper call, we should be ready to suffer for him.

3. God is our Sovereign Lord Proprietor, and may do in us, on us, and by us, what he will: Rom. 9:20, 21. 'Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?' There is no reason to murmur and fret under the cross, or any afflicting dispensations, that he exercises us with. Should he destroy that being that he gave us, to whom would he do wrong? As he gave it us freely, he may take it away, without any impeachment of his goodness and justice. May not God do with his own what he will?

4. We should use all the creatures we make use of with an eye to God, and due thankfulness to him, the giver; employing them for our use, and in our service, soberly and wisely, with hearts full of gratitude to our Divine Benefactor; considering they stand related to God as their Creator, and are the workmanship of his own hands. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving, 1 Tim. 4:4. They are not to be used to his dishonour, or the feeding of our base lusts and irregular appetites, but to fit us for and strengthen us in the performance of our duty to him.

5. There is no case so desperate, but faith may get sure footing with respect to it in the power and word of God. Let the people of God be

ever so low, they can never be lower than when they were not at all. Hence the Lord says, Isa. 65:18. 'Be glad and rejoice,' &c. He spoke a word and so the creature was made at first; and it will cost him but a word to make it over again. Hence Christ is called 'the beginning of the creation of God,' Rev. 3:14. O seek to be new-made by him; that old things may pass away, and all things become new.

6. Give away yourselves to God through Jesus Christ, making an hearty, a cheerful, and an entire dedication and surrender of your souls and bodies, and all that ye are and have, to him as your God and Father, resolving to serve and obey him all the days of your life: that as he made you for his glory, you may in some measure answer the end of your creation, which is to shew forth his praise. Serve not sin or Satan any longer. God made you upright and holy; but Satan unmade you, stripping you of your highest glory and ornament. Relinquish his service, which is the basest drudgery and slavery, and will land all that are employed in it in hell at last: and engage in the service of God in Christ, which is truly honourable and glorious, and will be crowned with an everlasting reward in the other world: for where he is, there shall his servants also be.

7. Lastly, This doctrine affords a ground of love, peace, justice and mercy betwixt men, which should be carefully cultivated by all that would desire to be with God for ever. For says the prophet, Mal. 2:10. 'Have we not all one Father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?' The consideration of being created by God, should be a powerful inducement to us to practise all the duties we owe to one another as men and Christians.

OF THE CREATION OF MAN

GEN. 1:27.—So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him: male and female created he them.

HAVING discoursed of the creation of all things out of nothing, and exhibited some of the displays of the admirable wisdom, power, and goodness of God apparent therein, I come now to speak of the creation of man, the masterpiece of the lower creation. In the text we have an answer to that question, 'How did God create man?' God only spake the word and then the other creatures were produced: but being to create man, he called a council of the Trinity for that end: whereby the excellency of man above the other creatures, who is a compend of the world, is clearly demonstrated. Here we have the execution of that council, So God created man, &c. For, as says Seneca, a heathen moralist, man is not a work huddled over in a haste, and done without great forethought and consideration; for man is the greatest and most stupendous work of God, even of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. As the sacred historian had said before of the Creator, 'Let us make man in our image,' &c. so it is not for nought that he repeats the act of creating three times in this verse; in which also the US in the former verse is restrained to God; so that the plurality there spoken of is not God and angels, but the three persons, one God; for it was not angels, but God that created man. Man here signifies man and woman, male and female, Adam and Eve. Wherefore they are called him and them; for as they were originally one, God having made two of one by creation; so they two were made one again by marriage. And they were both made in one day, Gen. 1:26–31.; and that in the image of God, which is twice repeated; the import whereof seems to be, that man was made very like God. Whereas there is but a shadow and vestige of him in the inferior creatures, as we may read the name and perfections of God in the least herb of the field; man was made so to represent God in his moral perfections as to imitate his virtues. Two things are here to be considered,

I. God's making man male and female.

II. His making man after his image.

I. Let us consider God's making man, male and female; that is, man and woman.

First, Adam was the male, and Eve the female. These were the common parents of all mankind, and there was no man in the world, before Adam. He is expressly called 'the first man,' 1 Cor. 15:5 and Eve 'the mother of all living,' Gen. 3:20. And hence it is said 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men,' Acts 17:26.

Secondly, Man consists of a soul and body, which being united constitute man; that is, man or woman. Here I shall consider, 1. The body; and, 2. The soul.

1. The body of the man. Man's body is a piece of most rare and curious workmanship, plainly indicating its divine Maker. In it there is a variety of members, none of them superfluous, but all adapted to the use assigned them by the wise Creator. The man's body, as Moses tells us, was formed of the dust of the ground, Gen. 2:7. Hence he was called Adam, which signifies red earth; of which sort of virgin-earth man's body seems to have been made. The word rendered dust, signifies not dust simply, (says Zanchius), but clay, which is earth and water. This may teach us humility, and repress our pride, and particularly glorying in beauty or any external advantages of person, seeing we are sprung of no higher original than the earth upon which we tread; especially seeing, as we derived our first being from it, we must return to it again, there to abide till the resurrection-day.

2. The woman's body was formed of the man's, Gen. 2:21, 22 of a rib of the man's side, but not a bare rib, but flesh on it, ver. 23 which was taken out of his side while he was in a deep sleep, into which God cast him; so that he felt no pain. And it is not improbable, that in that deep sleep God revealed to him what he himself afterwards declares concerning Eve, and marriage in general, ver. 23, 24. Whether Adam had more ribs than other men, is not determined. If he had, it was

not superfluous to him as the origin of mankind, though it might be as a private person; and therefore Eve being made of it, there was no more use for it. If he had not more ribs than other men, yet he sustained no loss thereby, which was otherwise made up, ver. 21 either by a new rib, or hardening the flesh to the use of a rib. In this the wisdom of God doth illustriously appear.

(1.) The woman's body was made of nobler matter than the man's, to be some ballast to the man's excellency in respect of his sex, that he might not despise but honour her. The word rendered made, Gen. 2:22 is in the Hebrew built. He made the man, but he built the woman, as a stately palace, or house, where all mankind draw their first breath.

(2.) It was made of the man's body, to teach men to love their wives as their own flesh.

(3.) It was not made out of man's head, to shew her that she is not to be her husband's mistress, nor usurp authority over him, 1 Tim. 2:12.; nor out of his feet, to shew him that she is not to be his slave, to be trampled on by him; but out of his side, near his heart, to shew him that she must be treated as his companion, loved, nourished, and cherished by him.

(4.) Lastly, The mystery of the church drawing her life out of Christ's sleeping the sleep of death on the cross, Eph. 5 seems to have been here intended and shadowed forth.

The bodies of both our first parents were far more beautiful, handsome, and graceful than our bodies are now. We are begot of men, but they were the immediate workmanship of God. The author being more excellent, the workmanship must be so too. And so Adam signifies to be ruddy, and to shine, Lam. 4:7. So that to Eve in particular may justly be applied the following lines of a celebrated poet:

A woman loveliest of the lovely kind,

In body perfect, and complete in mind.

Secondly, The soul of man was of an original far different from that of his body. Moses gives us this account of it, Gen. 2:7. 'The Lord God —breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' The Lord inspired him with a living reasonable soul, which presently appeared by his breathing at his nostrils; whereas before he was only a fair lifeless body. And this different account of man's soul and body clearly holds forth, that it was not fetched out of any power in the matter of his body, but was created of nothing. For this inspiration plainly implies that something was infused into it, which was not in it before, and did not originally inhere in it. Thus was the soul both of the man and the woman created; for that both were created with rational souls, is taught in our text, where they are said to be made after God's image; and Moses leaves us to gather the manner of the creation of the woman's soul from that of Adam's. Concerning the soul of man, three things are specially to be known.

1. That it is an incorporeal or spiritual substance, different from the body. It is called a spirit, Zech. 12:1. And Stephen prays, Acts 7:59. 'Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit. Compare Luke 24:39 where our Lord says concerning his body after his resurrection from the dead, 'Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.'

2. As the souls of Adam and Eve were immediately created of God, so the souls of all their posterity are immediately formed by God, and proceed not from their parents by generation or any other way: but God infuseth the soul created by him of nothing, into the body formed in the womb when it is fitly organised to receive it. And yet a man may properly be said to beget a man, though he only begets the body, as well as to kill a man, though he can only kill the body. This is plain from that express scripture-testimony, Zech. 12:1.—'that formeth the spirit of man within him.' So, Heb. 12:9. God is held forth as 'The Father of spirits,' in opposition to men as 'the fathers of our flesh;' which must needs be by immediate creation: for otherwise

he is the Father of our flesh too, Eccl. 12:7. 'Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it.' He gave the body too, but the soul in such a manner as he gave not the body.

3. Hence the soul is immortal, being a spirit, and dies not with the body, Eccl. 12:7 just cited. Being immaterial, not consisting of parts, it cannot be dissolved. Men can kill the body, but not the soul; and therefore it doth not die with the body, being invulnerable, and unsusceptive of external injuries, Matth. 10:28 and 22:32. Neither does it sleep till the resurrection, as some have foolishly supposed. Our Lord told the thief on the cross, that that very day he (that is, his soul) should be with him in paradise, not to sleep, but to be actively employed in exercises peculiar to the heavenly state. And certain it is that the apostle Paul had no such thought, when he said, Phil. 1:23. 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.' If his soul was to sleep and doze in indolence and inactivity after his death, he had never preferred the dissolution of his body, and the advantage of being with Christ, to his continuing in his mortal state, in which he was most usefully employed.

Thirdly, Why did God make man male and female?

1. That man might have a meet help, Gen. 2:18.; and this was the meetest help for the comfort of life, (however uncomfortable sin has now made it); otherwise God had given Adam a friend and not a wife. Hence the endearments of conjugal society, when discreetly and properly entered into and cultivated, are found, even in our present imperfect state, far preferable to those arising from the strictest and closest friendships among men.

2. For the lawful propagation of mankind, Gen. 1:27, 28 that there might be a godly seed, Mal. 2:15 and for a remedy against all inordinate lusts and libidinous desires.

II. Let us now consider God's making man after his own image.

Here I shall shew, 1. Who was created after God's image; and 2. Wherein this image consisted.

First, I am to shew who was created after the image of God. It was both the man and the woman, as is clear from the text. In this respect, indeed, there was one thing wherein the man excelled the woman, which is taken notice of by the apostle, 1 Cor. 11:7. 'He is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of the man.' Not but that the woman is the image of God in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, as well as the man: but the man is the image of God in respect of that authority which he has over his wife, who is the glory of man in respect of her subjection to him. So that what we say of the man as to his being created after the divine image, must be understood of the woman too.

Secondly, I will shew wherein the image of God, in which our first parents were made, consisted. Abstracting from the spirituality of their souls, and the erect and graceful posture of their bodies, peculiar to rational animals alone, which are but a faint shadow of the image of God, (if they can with any propriety be called a shadow of it at all), this image doth principally at least shine in the soul, and those glorious qualities wherewith man was endued, that is, both the man and the woman.

1. The image of God, after which man was created, consisted in knowledge, Col. 1:10. He was created wise: Not that he knew all things, for that is proper to the omniscient Being alone; but he was ignorant of nothing that he was obliged to know; he had all the knowledge that was necessary for life and godliness. He had clear and distinct apprehensions of God, his nature and perfections, far superior to any knowledge of that kind that can now be acquired by the most diligent and the most laboured researches of human industry. And we can hardly suppose that he was ignorant of the great mystery of the Trinity, considered abstractly; as it was most

certainly the second person who appeared to and conversed with him. This knowledge or wisdom of man appeared in his knowledge of the miraculous formation of Eve, whose nature and duty, as well as his own towards her, he declares; which he could not know but by a prophetic spirit. The primitive pair had God's law written on their hearts, Rom. 2:15 even that same law which was afterwards written on tables of stone, and promulgated from mount Sinai. It was concreated with them; so that no sooner were they man and woman, than they were knowing and intelligent creatures, endued with all the knowledge necessary for their upright state. Adam's giving names to the beasts, and those such as were expressive of their natures, Gen. 2:19 was a great evidence of his knowledge of nature. Thus his knowledge reached from the sun, that glorious fountain of light, to the meanest glow-worm that shines in the hedge. And that God gave them dominion over the earth and all the inferior creatures, is an evidence that they were endued with the knowledge of managing civil affairs, which a wise man will manage with discretion.

2. The image of God consisted in righteousness, Eph. 4:24. There was a perfect conformity in his will to the will of God. He was endued with a disposition to every good thing, Eccl. 7:29. 'God made man upright.' His will was straight with God's will, not bending to the right or left hand, without any irregular bias or inclination. And he had full power and ability to fulfil the whole law of God. As, in respect of knowledge, he perfectly knew the whole extent of his duty, so he was created with sufficient powers for the due performance thereof.

3. It consisted in holiness, Eph. 4:24. Man's affections were pure and holy, without being tinctured with any vitious appetite. They were regular and orderly, free from all disorder and distemper. They were set on lawful objects, and that in a right manner, loving what God loved, and hating what he hated; loving and delighting in God with all his heart, strength, soul, and mind. Yet all this happy disposition was mutable, he was not confirmed therein, nor set beyond the reach of falling therefrom, as the event has mournfully shewed.

This is that image of God wherein man was created, consisting in original righteousness, where his reason was naturally subject to God, his will to his reason, and his affections to his will, and consequently all duly subordinated to God, and directed to him, without any propensity or inclination to evil. A signal of this was, that both our first parents were naked, and yet were not ashamed, nor susceptible of shame.

That man was created in this condition, wise, altogether righteous, and holy, is not only clear from the above-cited scriptures, but is also agreeable to reason; which suggests, that nothing impure or imperfect, nothing having any vitious tendency or inclination, could proceed out of the hands of an holy God, who cannot be the author of evil. Man was created after the image of God; and in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, the scripture shews us, the image of God consists. Moreover, God made all very good, Gen. 1:31. Man's goodness consists in these excellent qualities; and without these he would not have been fit for the end of his creation. How was it possible for him to have exercised the dominion he was invested with over the creatures, or served his Creator in the manner that became him without such endowments? Hence I infer,

(1.) That man was not created in pure naturals, that is, with bare faculties, neither good nor evil. For 'God made man upright,' Eccl. 7:29.

(2.) That there was not naturally in man a combat betwixt the flesh and the spirit, betwixt reason and appetite; no inclination to sin, no lustings of the flesh, or the inferior faculties of the soul. For this corrupt will or inclination is sin properly and truly, as the apostle shews, Rom. 7:7 and the fountain of all sin. And to say, that these dispositions were in man at his original formation, makes God indeed the author of sin; seeing he made (as they falsely pretend) man of such matter as is necessarily accompanied with this corrupt will and depraved inclination. For says the apostle, 'All that is in the

world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world,' 1 John 2:16.

(3.) That original righteousness was natural to man, and not supernatural in the primitive state. Natural it was, in so far as it was concreated with him, and was necessary to the perfection of man as he came out of the creating hands of God; and was not added to be as a bridle to his natural inclinations to evil, whereof he had none.

(4.) That Adam had the same spiritual strength in innocency wherewith now the regenerate do believe in Christ; having a power to do whatsoever God should command, and to believe whatever he should reveal.

4. The image of God consisted consequently at least in dominion over the inferior creatures, whereby he had a right to dispose of them according to his pleasure, Gen. 1:26, 27.; which was a resemblance of the supreme dominion of God over the creatures, though not absolute and unlimited, but dependent on God. This was evidenced by the beasts being brought to Adam, in token of their subjection to him, and his imposing names on them expressive of their natures and properties.

The image of God seated in man's spiritual and immortal soul, endued with understanding, will, and affections, shone forth also in his body, which had a wonderful beauty in it, and such an admirable contexture of parts, adapted to their several uses and ends, as shewed it was intended for an immortal duration. There was no blemish, defect, nor disease, to be found in him. He was not liable to any attack by gout or gravel, or any tormenting pain. All the humours of his body were in a just temperament and disposition, calculated to prevent any distemper which might tend to the dissolution of that excellent constitution. His senses were all quick and lively, able to perform with vigour and delight their several operations. He was immortal in this state; and not subject to the attacks of death. Though his body was composed of jarring elements, which had a

natural tendency to dissolution, yet the soul was endued with such virtue as to embalm the body, and preserve it from the least degree of corruption. The tree of life was the sacramental pledge of man's immortality. The erect figure of his body looking towards heaven, and the majesty that is in his countenance, shewed man to be the chief of the works of God in this lower world.

I shall shut up all with a few inferences.

1. Ah! how are we fallen from heaven! What a lamentable change has sin brought on man! It has defaced the moral image of God, with which man's soul was beautifully decorated in his primitive state, and rent in pieces that pleasant picture of himself which God set up in this lower world. This stately fabric lies now in ruins, and calls us to lament over its ruins with weeping eyes and grieved hearts. Now there is ignorance in the mind, instead of that knowledge of God and divine things, with which it was richly furnished in its primitive state. The understanding, that as a lamp or candle shone brightly, is now enveloped with darkness. The will, that was exactly conformable to the will of God, and naturally disposed to comply with every intimation thereof, is now filled with irregularity, enmity, and rebellion against God and his law. The affections that were all regular, holy, and pure, are now disordered and distempered, placed upon and eagerly bent towards improper and sinful objects, loving and doating upon what men should hate, hating what they should love, joying in what they ought to mourn for, glorying in what is shameful, abhorring the chief good, and desiring what is ruinous to them. All the members of the body that were subordinated to the upright mind, and entirely at its command, are now in rebellion, and mislead and enslave the mind and superior faculties. And the creatures that were man's humble servants, ready to execute his commands, are now risen up against him, and the least of them having a commission, would prove more than a match for him. Nay, it is with difficulty and much pains that any of them are brought to engage in his service. Ah! how dismal is man's case! The crown is fallen from our head: wo unto us that we have sinned. Let us weep

and mourn over our ruined state, and never rest till we get it repaired by faith in the Lord Jesus, the great Repairer of this spiritual breach.

2. How lovely are knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, wherein the image of God consists! They shine with a dazzling brightness, and should charm and captivate our minds. But, alas! by nature we are blind, and see not their beauty and excellency. O! let us endeavour, through grace, to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of our minds, putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Try if this blessed change has passed upon you, if ye be now light in the Lord, be disposed to do his will, and are holy in heart and life. Study righteousness and holiness if ye would be like God. And beware of ignorance, unrighteousness, and impurity, which proceed from Satan, and make you so unlike a righteous and holy God.

3. Come to the Lord Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, and the beginning of the creation of God, who at first made man after the divine image, and can make him so over again, and will do so to those that come to him by faith, with this addition, that the image of God which he will impress on the soul anew, shall never be lost any more. O come to him now, that ye may become God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.

OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

MATTH. 10:29.—Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.

OUR Lord is here encouraging his disciples against all the troubles and distresses they might meet with in their way, and particularly against the fear of men, by the consideration of the providence of

God, which reaches unto the meanest of things, sparrows and the hairs of our head. Sparrows are of a mean price and small value; and yet, for as mean as they are, God preserves them, guides and disposes of all things concerning them, so that one of them cannot fall to the ground by shot or any other way, without his sovereign ordering and disposal.

The instruction deducible from the text is,

DOCT. 'There is a providence that extends itself to the least of things.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Shew that there is a providence.

II. Consider its object.

III. Explain the acts thereof.

IV. Consider its properties.

V. Lastly, make improvement.

I. I am to shew that there is a providence. This appears,

1. From plain scripture-testimonies; as Psal. 103:19. 'His kingdom ruleth over all.' Acts 17:28. 'In him we live, and move, and have our being,' Eph. 1:11.—'Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.' Providence is also held forth by a threefold scripture-emblem. Chiefly, (1.) Mount Moriah, which upon occasion of the miraculous preservation of Isaac, and a ram to be put in his room in order to be sacrificed, was called JEHOVAH JIREH, i. e. The Lord will provide, Gen. 22:14. (2.) Jacob's ladder, on which God appears managing all things, Gen. 28. (3.) Ezekiel's wheels, where there was a wheel in the middle of a wheel, denoting the agency of the first cause, and the superintending and directing providence of God, Ezek. 1.

2. From the nature of God, who being independent, and the first cause of all things, the creatures must needs depend upon him in their being and working. He is the end of all things, wise, knowing how to manage all for the best; powerful to effectuate whatever he has purposed; and faithful to accomplish all he has decreed, promised, or threatened.

3. From the harmony and order of the most confused things in the world. Every thing appears to a discerning eye to be wisely ordered, notwithstanding the confusions that seem to take place. What would become of the world, if there were not a providence seeing men that despise all order, and would fain give loose reins to their lusts and unbridled inclinations, are always the greatest party, and would overpower and destroy the smaller and most virtuous party? Herein the truth of providence clearly appears. The extraordinary judgments that have pursued and been inflicted upon wicked men, and the remarkable deliverances that have been granted to the church and people of God in all ages, do loudly proclaim a providence.

4. From the fulfilment of prophecies, which could not possibly be without a providence to bring them to pass.

II. Let us, in the next place, consider the object of providence, or that which it reacheth and extendeth to. And this is all the creatures, and all their actions, Heb. 1:3.—'Upholding all things by the word of his power,' Psal. 103:19. 'His kingdom ruleth over all.' The angels are subject to this providence, Neh. 9:6. 'Thou, even thou art Lord alone, thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all, and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.' So are also the devils, these infernal spirits, Matth. 8:31, 'If thou cast us out (said they to Jesus), suffer us to go away unto the herd of swine.' It reacheth natural things, as clouds, snow, winds, &c. as appears from Psal. 104; 147 and from daily observation. Casual things are ordered by providence, as lots, Prov. 16:33. 'The lot is cast into the lap: but the whole disposing thereof is

of the Lord.' So in the case of accidental manslaughter, *Exod. 21:13*. 'If a man lie not in wait, and God deliver him into his hand.' There is nothing so mean but providence extends to it, such as the falling of a sparrow, and the numbering of the hairs of our head. It is God that feeds the fowls and the young ravens that cry. He clothes the lilies and grass of the field, that have no hand of man about them. He made lice, frogs, &c. a plague to scourge Pharaoh and his people, worms to eat up Herod, &c. In a special manner providence is conversant about man, forming him in the womb, 'Hast thou not poured me out as milk (says Job), and curdled me like cheese? Thou hast clothed me with flesh and hast fenced me with bones and sinews,' *Job 10:10, 11*.—bringing him forth out of his mother's bowels, and holding him up thereafter, *Psal. 71:6*. His heart is in the Lord's hand, and all his thoughts and inclinations are under his controul, *Prov. 21:1*. He directs and orders all his steps. The most free acts of the creature's will are governed by superintending providence. All their good actions, *John 15:5*. 'Without me ye can do nothing.' So also their evil actions, *Acts 4:27, 28*. 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done,' *Gen. 45:7*. 'God sent me before you,' says Joseph to his brethren, though they had wickedly sold him into Egypt.

III. I proceed to consider the acts of providence. They are two, preserving and governing the creatures and their actions.

1. God by his providence preserves all the creatures. This preservation of the creatures is an act of providence, whereby they are preserved in their being and power of acting, *Heb. 1:3*. 'Upholding all things by the word of his power.' In this God sometimes makes use of means, and sometimes acts without means. We have both described, *Hos. 2:21, 22*. 'I will hear saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear

Jezreel.' He preserves the heavens immediately, the earth, the corn, the wine, and the oil, &c. mediately. And thus by his providence he provides all things necessary for the preservation of all things; Psal. 145:15, 16. 'The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine haud, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' This act of providence is so necessary, that nothing could subsist one moment without it. For there is no necessary connexion betwixt the being of the creatures this moment and their being the next; and as they could not give themselves a being, so they cannot continue it, but must be upheld by God as a ball in the air, Heb. 1:3. There is a continual efflux of providence necessary for preserving and upholding the creatures in their being, otherwise they would be independent, and could preserve themselves, which is grossly absurd.

2. God does not only preserve the creatures, but governs and manages them, which is the second act of providence; whereby he disposes of all things, persons, and actions, according to his will, Prov. 21:1. 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will, Prov. 16:33. 'The lot is cast into the lap: but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.' Chap. 16:9. 'A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.' And this act of providence is also necessary: for as the creature cannot be or exist without God, so neither can it act without him, Acts 17:21. 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being.' God does not make man as the carpenter doth the ship, which afterwards sails without him; but he rules and guides him, sitting at the helm, to direct and order all his motions: so that whatever men do, they do nothing without him: not only in their good actions, where he gives grace, and excites it, working in them both to will and to do of his good pleasure: but also in their evil actions, wherein they are under the hand of Providence, but in a very different manner.

For understanding this point, how the providence of God reacheth to and is concerned in sinful actions, we are to consider, that God neither puts evil into the hearts of men, nor stirs them up to it: for,

says the apostle, Jam. 1:13. 'God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any man.' And therefore he is not the author of sin. But,

1. God permits sin, when he does not hinder it, which he is not obliged to do. Not that it falls out so as he cannot hinder it, for he is omnipotent, and can do all things; nor yet as if he cared not what fell out in the world; but he does wisely, for his holy ends, efficaciously will not to hinder it: Hence we read, Acts 14:16 that 'God in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.' He does not permit sin, for that he will not violate or force the creature's free will; for God's providence offers no violence to the will of the creature; and if so, he should never hinder sin at all, for the same reason. But certainly he has holy ends in the permission of sin: for thereby his justice, mercy, wisdom, and love, in sending his Son to save sinners, do conspicuously appear, which otherwise would have been under an eternal cloud, hid from the view of men and angels.

For the further illustration of this doctrine relating to the concern of providence in sinful actions, we are to consider them in a twofold respect, as simple actions, or natural actions of the creature, abstract from any obliquity or deformity cleaving to them; and as actions having irregularity and pravity in them. Considered as natural actions of the creature, they are all effected by the providence of God, which co-operates with, and enables the creature to produce them, in such a manner that without the efflux of providence the creature could not move a hand or foot, or perform any action whatever; 'for in him we move:' and no action of the creature simply considered, or as a natural action, can be sinful, but has a goodness of being in it, and is effected by the influence of providence. As to the pravity or sin that is in actions, as God decreed the futuration of sin, or permitted it to take place, and did not hinder it; so all the sin or vitiosity that is in actions proceeds entirely from the creature, and the evil lusts and passions that are in his heart.

Thus a man's taking up a stone, and throwing it, is a natural action, which the providence of God enables him to perform; but his

throwing it at another man with an intention to kill him, is permitted by God, otherwise it could not take place; for if a hair cannot fall from our head without the providence of God, much less can a man be murdered without it: and the killing of the man by the throwing of the stone, proceeds entirely from the malice and wickedness that was in the heart of the murderer, the operation of which God did not hinder, which he is nowise obliged to do.

2. God leaves the sinner so far as he sees meet to the swing of his own lusts, and denies him restraining grace. Thus it is said of Hezekiah, a godly king, that, "in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart," 2 Chron. 32:31. And when the restraint is taken off the sinner, he runs furiously, to evil.

3. God bounds sin, and restrains men in their sins, as he does the raging sea, allowing it to go so far, but no further. He has such a power and command over wicked men, that they are not masters of their own affections and dispositions, but many times act quite contrary to what they had firmly resolved and proposed: as in the case of Laban. He pursued Jacob, when he left Padan-aram, in order to return into his own country, with a wicked intention to do him hurt, by robbing him of his wives, children, and cattle; but the Lord restrained him, and influenced him to enter into a covenant of friendship with the good patriarch, Gen. 32. Thus Esau had resolved on Jacob's death, and went out to meet him with a purpose to destroy him; but when providence brought them together, it is said, "Esau embraced Jacob, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Thus Balaam came with an express intention to curse Israel, and yet he fell a blessing them. Thus he bent the hearts of the Egyptians to favour the Israelites, so that they sent them away with great riches, by lending them jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and costly garments. Thus, by a secret instinct, he turned Jehoshaphat's enemies away from him, when they came with a purpose to destroy him, 2 Chron. 18:31.; and at another time he turned his enemies against

themselves, so that they sheathed their swords in one another's bowels, 2 Chron. 20. Thus also he restrained the soldiers that broke the legs of the two thieves that were crucified with Christ, from touching his, in order to accomplish his word, that a bone of the paschal lamb, which was a type of Christ, the Lamb of God, should not be broken. So true is that saying of the Psalmist, Psal. 76:10. 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.' God has a bridle in the mouths of wicked men, when they are under the most impetuous fury of their lusts, to turn them as he will, restraining and curbing in respect of some, and giving swing to others.

4. Lastly, God over-rules all to a good end. God has one end in wicked actions, and the sinner another. The sinner minds and intends evil, but God means and designs good by them all. So Joseph's brethren, in their cruelly selling him for a slave, meant evil to the poor youth; but God, in that dispensation meant it for good, and brought much good out of it to Joseph, and his father and brethren. Thus the Jews crucified Christ out of malice against him; but God by that crucifixion intended satisfaction to his justice for the sins of men, and the redemption and salvation of an elect world. Thus God brings good, the greatest good out of the worst of evils. What greater evil or more atrocious wickedness can be imagined, than the violent death of the innocent Son of God, who went about doing good, and was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners? and yet what a rich and astonishing good resulted therefrom, even glory to God, and peace and good-will towards men!

IV. Our next business is to consider the properties of divine providence.

1. God's providence is most holy, Psal. 145:17. 'The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.' Even though providence reach to and be conversant in sinful actions, yet it is pure; as the sun contracts no defilement, though it shine on a dunghill. For God is neither the physical nor moral cause of the evil of any action, more

than he who rides on a lame horse is the cause of his halting. All the evil that is in sinful actions proceeds and flows from the wicked agent, as the stench of the dunghill does not proceed from the heat of the sun, but from the corrupt matter contained in the dunghill.

2. It is most wise, Isa. 28:29. 'This cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.' Infinite wisdom always proposes the most excellent ends in all its operations, and uses the best methods for accomplishing its ends. However perplexed confused, and void of wisdom providential administrations may appear to us poor mortals of narrow, shallow capacities, yet they are the result of the highest wisdom and the deepest counsel, as proceeding from and directed by him whose name is the only wise God, and cannot but manage all things with the greatest understanding. And the day will at last come when it shall be said by the united voice of the whole assembly and church of the first-born, that God hath done all things well: and then the plan of providence will appear in every respect to have been most wise, harmonious and consistent.

3. Providence is most powerful. Hence the Lord says to Sennacherib, the king of Assyria 'I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest,' 2 Kings 19:28. 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.' Who can resist his will which is almighty? He can never fail of his end, but all things fall out according to his decree, which is efficacious and irresistible.

I shall conclude with an use of exhortation.

1. Beware of drawing an excuse for your sin from the providence of God; for it is most holy, and has not the least efficiency in any sin you commit. Every sin is an act of rebellion against God; a breach of his holy law, and deserves his wrath and curse; and therefore cannot be authorised by an infinitely-holy God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without detestation and abhorrence. Though he has

by a permissive decree allowed moral evil to be in the world, yet that has no influence on the sinner to commit it. For it is not the fulfilling of God's decree, which is an absolute secret to every mortal, but the gratification of their own lusts and perverse inclinations, that men intend and mind in the commission of sin.

2. Beware of murmuring and fretting under any dispensations of providence that ye meet with; remembering that nothing falls out without a wise and holy providence, which knows best what is fit and proper for you. And in all cases, even amidst the most afflicting incidents that befall you, learn submission to the will of God; as Job did, when he said, in consequence of a train of the heaviest calamities that happened to him, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord,' Job 1:21. In the most distressing case say with the disciples, 'The will of the Lord be done,' Acts 21:14.

3. Beware of anxious cares and diffidence about your through-bearing in the world. This our Lord has cautioned his followers against, Matth. 6:31. 'Take no thought (that is, anxious and perplexing thought), saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?' Never let the fear of man stop you from duty, Matth. 10:28, 29.; but let your souls learn to trust in God, who guides and superintends all the events and administrations of providence, by whatever hands they are performed.

4. Do not slight means, seeing God worketh by them; and he that hath appointed the end orders the means necessary for gaining the end. Do not rely upon means, for they can do nothing without God, Matth. 4:4. Do not despond if there be no means, for God can work without them, as well as with them; Hos. 1:7. 'I will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.' If the means be unlikely, he can work above them, Rom. 4:19. 'He considered not his own body now dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.' If the means be

contrary, he can work by contrary means, as he saved Jonah by the whale that devoured him. That fish swallowed up the prophet, but by the direction of providence, it vomited him out upon dry land.

5. Lastly, Happy is the people whose God the Lord is: for all things shall work together for their good. They may sit secure in exercising faith upon God, come what will. They have ground for prayer; for God is a prayer-hearing God, and will be inquired of by his people as to all their concerns in the world. And they have ground for the greatest encouragement and comfort amidst all the events of providence, seeing they are managed by their covenant God and gracious friend, who will never neglect or overlook his dear people, and whatever concerns them. For he hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. 13:5.

THE WISE OBSERVATION OF PROVIDENCES ILLUSTRATED AND ENFORCED

PSAL. 107:43.—Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.

WHOSOEVER would walk with God, must be due observers of the word and providence of God, for by these in a special manner he manifests himself to his people. In the one we see what he says; in the other what he does. These are the two books that every student of holiness ought to be much conversant in. They are both written with one hand, and they should both be carefully read, by those that would have not only the name of religion, but the thing. They should be studied together, if we would profit by either; for being taken together, they give light the one to the other; and as it is our duty to read the word, so it is also our duty to observe the work of God, Psal. 28:5. The one I formerly recommended; and I am now to press the

other, as a proper addition to our late discourse on the providence of God, from the text now read. Wherein we have two things.

1. The observing of providences recommended, Whoso is wise, &c. In the Hebrew it runs, Who is wise, and will observe these things. Wherein we may observe,

1st, The duty itself recommended, observing these things. Where we are to consider the act and the object.

(1.) The object these things; that is, the dispensations of providence. These are the things the Psalmist would have men to observe. For the design of this psalm is to praise God for his wonderful works of providence in the world, especially in the church. For this cause he sets before us, (1.) Wonderful deliverances wrought by providence, instanced in the seasonable relief given to, (1.) Needy and bewildered strangers, far from their own, ver. 3–9. (2.) Captives and prisoners, ver. 10–16. (3.) Sick people at the gates of death, ver. 17–22. (4.) To seafaring men in a storm, ver. 23–32. (2.) Strange and surprising changes in human affairs. (1.) Fruitful places made barren, and barren places fruitful. ver. 33–35. For an instance of which we need but consider this our own country, sometime a forest, for little use but to be a hunting-field, now comfortably maintaining many families, and useful to the nation by its great store. (2.) Mean families raised by a blessing on their husbandry and store, and cast down again from their prosperity by cross providences, ver. 36–39. (3.) Those that were high in the world abased, and those that were mean and despicable raised to honour, ver. 40, 41. These turns of providence are of use to solace saints, and silence sinners, ver. 42. Now, here is a field opened for serious observation. These and such like things we are called to notice.

(2.) The act, observation. We must not let providences pass without remark, but observe them carefully, as men that are neither fools nor atheists, but have eyes in their heads, and do not think the world is guided by blind chance, but by an infinitely wise God. The word

signifies to take heed, and retain, as a watchman in a city does. We must take heed to them as they fall out, and carefully keep them in mind, that they be not forgot, or slip out of our minds.

2dly, The qualification necessary to fit a man for this duty, wisdom. This is true spiritual wisdom; for in scripture language all strangers to serious godliness are accounted fools, however sharp-sighted otherwise they be. As for others, they neither will nor can rightly observe these things.

3dly, The manner of the expression. It intimates, (1.) That there are few so wise as to observe providences. Most part of the world are stupid on that point; they let them go and come without notice, Jer. 9:12. (2.) That those who are truly wise will do it, Hos. 14 ult.

2. The advantage accruing from a wise observation of providences. They shall understand thereby the loving-kindness, goodness, and mercy of God, written out in his dispensations towards themselves and others; as we know how one stands affected to us by his behaviour towards us. His works will give us a clearer discovery of his glorious perfections; and these observations will enrich us with experiences. It is remarkable that some of these things are cross providences; yet a right observation of them will shew us God's kindness; for the divine goodness may be seen in cross providences as well as in favourable ones.

From the text I shall only observe one doctrine at present.

DOCT. "It is the duty of Christians wisely to observe providences."

This is a weighty point in practical religion, that requires observation in speaking to it, and practising it.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall shew,

I. What it is to observe providences wisely.

II. What are the objects about which we are to make our observations.

III. What we are to observe in them.

IV. The reasons why Christians should wisely observe providences.

V. Make some practical improvement.

I. I am to shew what it is to observe providences wisely. It presupposes some things, and imports some things.

First, It presupposes these four things.

1. That there is a providence. The world is not managed by fortune, nor do things fall out by blind chance. That there is a God, and that there is a providence, have been always looked on by men of sound judgment as certain maxims, establishing one another. And indeed to set up the creatures to act otherwise than under the providence of God, is to set them up for independent beings, that is, for gods. The scripture is plain that it reacheth all things, Rom. 11:36. 'For of him, and through him, and to him are all things;' even from the greatest to the least, as ye will see from Mat. 10:29, 30, 31. 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing; and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.' And unless it were so, how could he foresee and foretel things, Isa. 46:10.

Some think this would disturb his repose, and is unworthy of him, and his purity and wisdom. But do not these atheists see the sun in the heavens undisturbed, with his (yet) universal influence, shine on the dunghill as well as the garden, without contracting any spot? And is it unworthy of God to govern what he has created? As for the wisdom in the management of the world, they are fools who judge it folly before they see the end.

2. The faith of this providence. We must believe the doctrine of providence, if we would be wise observers thereof. The faith of the saints in this point may be shaken in an hour of temptation; as was the case with Asaph, Psal. 73:13, 14, 15. 'Verily (says he) I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.' And the unbelief of others therein makes them half atheists, Mal. 3:14, 15. 'Ye have said, it is vain to serve God: and what profit is it, that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.' And the slender belief there is of it in the world makes men overlook providence, Hab. 1:16. 'Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag: because by them their portion is fat and their meat plenteous.' Labour ye firmly to believe providence, that ye may observe it; nay, believe it, and ye will observe it.

3. Providence has a language to the children of men. It is a clear part of the name of God whereby he manifests himself to the world, and has served to convince men of his eternal power and Godhead, whom no other arguments could reach: Dan. 4 ult. 'Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, and extol, and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment, and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.' Psal. 19:3, 4. 'There is no speech, nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' Rods have a language, Micah 6:9. 'The Lord's voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.' And so also have mercies a language, Rom. 2:4. 'Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.' And providences being the work of a rational agent, they must have a design.

4. A disposition to understand the language and design of providence. It is for this end they are observed wisely, Micah 6:9

forecited. God speaks by providence, and the wise hearken by observation, that they may know what is meant by those characters, in which God writes his mind towards them. Hence the more one pursues communion with God, he will the more narrowly observe providence; and when he grows remiss and negligent as to communion with God, he lets these things easily pass. But these are the prints of the Lord's feet, which one walking with God will set himself to observe.

Secondly, To observe providences wisely, imports these five things.

1. A watching for them till they come. Hence says the prophet, Hab. 2:1. 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.' This is to wait on the Lord in the way of his judgments, Isa. 26:8. A practice necessarily following on the serious practice of godliness, in laying matters before the Lord by prayer, and depending on him according to his word, Psal. 130:1, 5, 6. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. I wait for the Lord, and my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning: I say more, than they that watch for the morning.' Some providences have a glaring light with them, that cannot but strike the eye of the beholder; but others not being so may pass unobserved, if people be not on their watch. Providence sometimes works long under ground, and wraps itself up in a long night of darkness; but the wise observer will wait the dawning of the day, and the setting up its head above ground, Psal. 69:3. 'Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God,' Lam. 3:49, 50. 'Mine eye trickleth down and ceaseth not, without any intermission: till the Lord look down, and behold from heaven.' For they that believe will not make haste.

2. A taking heed to them, and marking them when they come, Isa. 25:9. 'Lo this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.' Heeding them, I mean, as from the hand of the

Lord; for though men heed the thing, if they do not heed the hand it comes from, they have but the carcase without the soul of providences. The threads of providence are sometimes so small and fine, and our senses so little exercised to discern, that they may come and go without our notice, Luke 19:44. 'Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.' Therefore the eyes of the wise man are in his head, to observe what comes from heaven; looking aforehand, and in the time; for he that looks sees, Ezek. 1:15, Zech. 6:1.

3. A serious review of them, pondering and narrowly considering them. We should not only look to them, but into them, Psal. 111:2. 'The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.' And the more we see of them, the more of God we will see in them; for the further we wade in these waters, the deeper. Providence is a wheel within a wheel, a piece of the nice workmanship of heaven, which may make us cry out with wonder many a time, O wheel! Ezek. 10:13. The design of providence oft times lies hid, not to be seen at first view; but we must look again and again, and narrowly inspect it, ere we can comprehend it. It is a mystery many times, looking at which our weak eyes will begin to dazzle. And that we may unravel the clue by a sanctified judgment, Psal. 77:6 it will be needful to call in the help of prayer, with much humility, faith, and self-denial, Job 10:2 and of the scripture, Psal. 73:16.

4. Laying them up, and keeping them in record, Luke 1:66. We should keep them as one would do a treasure, for the time to come. Then are they experiences, which will be notable provision for after-times. O, if these observations were wisely made, and carefully laid up, the former part of our life might furnish noble helps for the latter part of it; and the longer we lived, the richer would we be in this spiritual treasure: even as in war one victory helps to get another. And the old disciple might have a body of practical experimental divinity in his head, drawn forth from his own observation. We find David, when young, improving providences formerly thus observed, 1 Sam. 17:37. 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion,

and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine;' and when old doing the same, Psal. 37:25. 'I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.'

5. Lastly, It is a practical observation of them. They who observe providences wisely do not observe them only to clear their judgments, and inform their understandings, as by matters of speculation; but to influence their hearts and affections in the conduct of their life, Micah 6:9. The more that one wisely observes providence, he will be the more holy. The observing the work of providence about himself and others, will advance the work of grace in the heart, and holiness in the life, Rom. 5:4. 'Patience worketh experience; and experience hope,' Psal. 64:7, 9. 'God shall shoot at them with an arrow, suddenly shall they be wounded. And all men shall fear, and shall declare the work of God; for they shall wisely consider his doing.' It is a woful observation of providence, when it has no good effect on people to make them better. Hence Moses says to the Israelites, Deut. 29:2, 3, 4. 'Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs and those great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.' But it is yet worse when people are made worse thereby, as in the case of him who said, 'Behold this evil is of the Lord, what! should I wait for the Lord any longer?' 2 Kings 6:33. But it is a kindly effect of it when men accommodate their spirits to the divine dispensations they are under, according to that, Eccl. 7:14. 'In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider.'

II. I come now to speak of the objects about which we are wisely to make our observations, these things. This is a spacious field, as broad as the universe, or the whole creation, so far as we come to the knowledge any manner of way of the works of God. For providence reacheth to all things, and in every thing the finger of God is to be seen. None of all God's works of providence laid open to our view are

excepted, nor allowed to be overlooked, Psal. 28:5. And all of them may be profitably noticed. But more particularly, I shall offer you a sample of the admirable web of providence; a sample, I say, for how small a part of his ways do we know? The dispensations of providence may be considered,

1. With respect to their objects.
2. With respect to their kinds.
3. With respect to the time of their falling out.

FIRST, Providences may be considered with respect to their objects, which are all the creatures and all their actions. And here let us,

FIRST, Look into the invisible world, and trace providence a little there. It becomes Christians to cause their eye to follow there where God's hand is before them at work. David tells us, Psal. 139:8. 'If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.' God is there with his hand of providence, ver. 10. 'Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.' And the apostle gives the Christian that character, 2 Cor. 4:18 that 'he looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.'

First, Look to the lower part of that world, the kingdom of darkness, and there you see devils and damned spirits of men, with the providence of God about them in an awful manner. A fearful web of providence encompasses them.

1. Concerning devils, view the awful providences they are under, and observe,

(1.) How these once glorious creatures are now irrecoverably lost, and reserved to a certain and dreadful judgment, 2 Pet. 2:4. Jude 6. Behold and learn the severity of God's justice from this his work; how no natural excellency will preserve the creature from wrath when

once defiled with sin. They were the first that ventured to break over the hedge of the holy law, and God set them up for dreadful examples to the whole creation. Behold the power of God, whose hands devils themselves cannot rid themselves out of. And understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, in providing a Saviour for man, and not for them, Heb. 2:16.

(2.) How, notwithstanding, these malicious creatures are not so pent up in their prison, but they are permitted to go about through the world; yet this world is generally inhabited without molestation from them. Only now and then, in some very rare cases, they are suffered to molest men, by a particular providential permission as in the case of Job, chap. 2. This general case of the world is a continued wonder of providence. How is it that ever we get any rest from them in house or field? It is not for want of will or natural power, but from the restraint of providence upon them, continued upon them, notwithstanding the world's wickedness. Observe this thankfully, and understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.

2. Concerning damned spirits, who are in hell under the wrath of God, see the awful providences about them, and observe how miserable they are, Luke 16:23 being 'punished from the presence of the Lord,' 2 Thess. 1:9 all hopes of recovery being now lost for ever. And learn how precious time is, that what we have to do, ye may do quickly: how deceitful sin and the world are; and how severely God punishes at length, though he may long bear with sinners. And understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, that ye are yet in the land of the living, under means of grace, and hopes of glory.

Secondly, Look to the upper part of the invisible world, the regions of bliss; and there you will see angels and the spirits of just men made perfect wrapt up in a glorious web of providence, sparkling with goodness and mercy. See the Larger Catechism on Providence.

Concerning the blessed angels, observe,

1. How they are established in holiness and happiness, 1 Tim. 5:21. They were of the same changeable nature with those that fell; but God held them up, and has confirmed them, that they cannot fall now. And learn the power of sovereign grace, which can establish one tottering creature when another falls; and how happy they are who cheerfully do the will of God, for so the angels do in heaven. Though proud shining hypocrites fall away and perish, yet trembling saints shall be made to stand.

2. How they are employed in the administration of his power, mercy, and justice, 2 Kings 19:35. In one night the angel of the Lord smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand, Heb. 1:14. 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?' God sends them to take care of his children, who no doubt receive many benefits off their hands, which they are not sensible of. Understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in sending them, and their love to God and man in taking such employment. The living creatures have the wheels going by them.

Concerning the souls of the blessed, observe how blessed and happy they are in the enjoyment of God, where no clouds interpose betwixt them and the light of his countenance, Heb. 12:23. Luke 16:22. And learn here what a vain thing this world is, and how we may be happy without it, yea cannot be completely happy till we be beyond it. What a rich harvest the seed of grace in the soul brings in, and how holiness leads the way to complete happiness. Wonderful is the loving-kindness of the Lord, that takes those who serve him here, to be his attendants in his palace and brings them to the full enjoyment of himself in glory.

Let this suffice for a sample of providence in the invisible world.

SECONDLY, Look to the visible world, and trace providence there. See how the hand of the Lord is constantly at work about these his

creatures which he has made, John 5:17. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

1. Consider the inanimate or lifeless creatures, which are the objects of providence as well as other things. They are not capable of self-governing, but he that made them guides them to their ends.

The heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars, are under the government of wise providence. They got their orders at first, Gen. 1:16. 'God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.' And they have still observed these orders since. Psal. 104:19. 'He appointed the moon for seasons: the sun knoweth his going down.' Sometimes indeed by a particular commission, they have altered their ordinary course as in Joshua's time, chap. 10:12, 13, when the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon; for a whole day; but they returned to their course again. The sun keeps his course allotted him by the divine decree; for should he go at random, our earth would either be burnt or quite frozen up, that we could not live on it. O the loving-kindness of the Lord, that makes the very heavenly bodies punctually to keep pace with our necessities, and has not avenged himself on men's disorders, by suffering these to go into disorder and confusion!

The raging sea is under the management of providence. God manages it as easily as the nurse does the infant, whom she swaddles and lays in its cradle, from whence it cannot get out, while she will have it to stay there; Job 38:11. 'Hitherto shalt thou come (says Providence to this unruly element), but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' O look to his work and learn his loving-kindness, Psal. 104:24, 25, 26. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches. So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. There go the ships; there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein.' Behold his greatness, and adore him, Matth. 8:27. 'What manner of man is this,

that even the winds and the sea obey him?' Fear before such a mighty One, Isa. 28:2. And let it quiet your hearts under all the tossings ye meet with in the world; for it will cost him but to say, 'Peace and be still;' Psal. 93:4. 'The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.'

The air and wind, which no man can lay hold of, are entirely under the conduct of Providence, John 3:8. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' in respect of man; but in respect of God, where he listeth, Matth. 8:27 forecited. What a wonder is it, (not to speak of tempests, hail, rain, snow, &c. Psal. 147:15–18), that such a thin invisible body should bear up all the fowls of the air, the heavy clouds also, and carry them from place to place, so that we may say, as Psal. 18:10. 'He rode upon a cherub, and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind! How then can our God be at a loss for means to support us? He has filled the world with it; it is about us, in us, in our nostrils, in our bowels, nay, in every pore of our bodies; yea, without it we could not breathe, yet we see it not. Shall we then think it strange, that the God who made it is every where present? Nay, he is without and within us, though we see him not. If he mix pestilential vapours with it, we are dead men, as if poison were mixed with our drink: for at every breathing we draw it in; so entirely do we depend on the Lord. O then understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in this respect.

The earth is under the care and government of the same wise Providence. He made it, and that was a great work; he preserves it and governs it, and that is another. He supports it, Heb. 1:3. The earth bears us, but what bears the earth? You cannot think it is infinite or boundless, and therefore it must have another side opposite to that we are on. Yes, and by the powerful providence of God it hangs like a ball in the air, Job 26:7. 'He hangeth the earth upon nothing.' O then, is there any thing too hard for our God to do? He fills it with his riches, the surface of it, and the bowels of it, Psal. 104:24. But what is most necessary for men's use is on the surface of it, easiest to be come at, Job 28. He feeds it, that it may feed us,

Deut. 11:11. Hos. 2:21, 22. When the strength thereof is weakened with new influences from the heavens, he renews it, Psal. 104:30. And since the flood, the promise then given, Gen. 8:22 that 'while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease,' has been punctually performed. O understand the loving-kindness of the Lord in these things, what a gracious and bountiful God he is! And learn how surely all his promises to his people shall be accomplished.

2. Consider the vegetative part of the world, things that have life, but not sense, such as trees, plants, &c. how Providence cares for and manages them. Our Lord calls us to observe these things, and thereby understand the loving-kindness of the Lord, Matth. 6:28. 'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin.' Lilies of the field have not the care of man about them, as those of the garden, but Providence cares for them. This teaches us to lay by anxiety, and trust God, ver. 30. See how the earth is kindly furnished with vegetables by providence, not only for men's necessity, but their conveniency and delight, Psal. 104:14–17. And shall not this good God be loved and cheerfully served by us? Every pile of grass is a preacher of the loving-kindness of the Lord.

3. Consider the sensitive part of the world, such as have life and sense, but not reason; as birds, beasts, and fishes. And observe what a vast family are maintained on the Creator's cost. And though we cannot trust providence, yet what an innumerable company there is of dependents on mere providence! Psal. 104:27. 'These all wait upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season.' Observe this provision, and thence learn to believe even where ye cannot see, Matth. 6:26, 'Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?' For Providence does for them that have none to do for them; Psal. 147:9. 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens that cry.' Observe how providence has subjected them to man as servants that could easily be his masters in respect of strength, as the horse, ox, &c. yet the face

of man strikes a damp upon them, which is the more remarkable, that man by sin did forfeit his dominion over the creatures. But this must be resolved into the virtue of that word, executed daily by providence, Gen. 9:2. 'The fear of you, and the dread of you, shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea.' O what a power is in a word of divine appointment?

4. Consider the rational part of the world, men having life, sense, and reason. In these providence shews itself most brightly. Man is the compend of the creation, having a spirit as angels are spirits, and a body with the rest. And he is the peculiar care of Heaven. This is the main object of our observation.

1st, We should observe the dispensations of providence towards societies; and the nearer our relation to them be, we should observe them the more narrowly.

(1.) Towards societies of men in the world, kingdoms, churches, congregations, families, &c.

[1.] Much of the power, wisdom, goodness, justice, &c. of God, might be learned from the revolutions and changes in states and kingdoms, which should make us inquisitive for the knowledge of public affairs. And O what a glorious scene of providence has been opened of late in Britain, shining with illustrious mercy to the church and nation, in delivering us when at the brink of ruin; depth of wisdom, in baffling in a moment the cunning projects of enemies; almighty power, in so easily crushing their towering hopes; radiant justice, in making the stone tumble down on the heads of those that rolled it, and making enquiry for the blood of the saints shed many years ago.*

[2.] Providences toward the church of God are mainly to be observed, 1 Sam. 4:13. The angels themselves notice these, to learn something from them, Eph. 3:10. What concerns the church is the greatest work on the wheel of providence; and in most, if not all the great works of

God through the world, he has in them an eye to his church. As she is for God, so other things are for her.

Particularly we should observe the way of providence towards the church of Scotland, whereof we are members; which has been as admirable a mixture of mercy and judgment, as perhaps any church since the apostles days has met with. How high has she been raised in peace and purity, and how low laid at other times! How often has she been at the brink of ruin, and wonderfully preserved? How have her faithful friends been signally owned of God, and her enemies often borne the evident marks of God's displeasure! &c. And yet, more particularly,

We should observe the way and aspect of providence towards the congregation, how the Lord has been and is dealing with us, that we may accommodate ourselves to his dispensations, and answer the call of them.

[3.] Towards families. Sometimes the Lord causes a warm sunshine of prosperity on families, and sometimes the heavens are louring above them; they have their risings and fallings, as all other societies in this changeable world, as is beautifully described by the Psalmist, Psal. 107:38, 39, 41. 'He blesseth them also, so that they are multiplied greatly, and suffereth not their cattle to decrease. Again they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow. Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.' How does Job mournfully observe the way of providence with his family, chap. 29:2–5 and David on his death-bed the humbling circumstances of his! 2 Sam. 23:5.

There are few of our families but God has of late one way or other visited them; his voice has cried to our houses, as well as to the land. It is our duty to observe the same, read the language of it, and comply with the design thereof.

2dly Towards particular persons; for we may learn something, from God's way with every one. And,

(1.) Towards others, whether godly or wicked. This was the Psalmist's practice to have his eyes in his head, and to look about him in the world, and learn something for his own establishment, both from the harms and happiness of others, Psal. 37:35–37. 'I have seen the wicked in great power; and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and 'behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.' It is observable, that the holy scripture is not written as a system of precepts, with the reasons of them; but the body of it is a cluster of examples, wherein we may see, as in a glass, what we are to follow if we would be happy, and what we are to shun, Rom. 15:4. 'For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.' A plain evidence, that whoso would please God, must observe those things that are set before his eyes in providence.

(2.) Towards ourselves in particular. These providences come nearest us, and therefore should be most narrowly observed. In these we are the parties to whom God directs his speech immediately; but, alas! often it is not observed, Job 33:14. 'For God speaketh once, yea twice, but man perceiveth it not.' There is none of us that are not the objects of wonderful providences, but especially true Christians, who may well say, as Psal. 40:5. 'Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.' We might each of us fill a volume with accounts of the wonderful works of God, and yet confine ourselves to what has happened to ourselves, if we had but the wisdom to observe the same. Every moment we would be a wonder to ourselves, if we could but discern the beautiful mixture of that web of providence wherein every moment we are wrapt up.

(1.) Let us observe how we are powerfully preserved by Providence, Heb. 1:3. Psal. 36:6. 'Lord, thou preservest man and beast.' When we consider how unlike our souls are to our bodies, we may more wonder at the continuance than the breach of that union. When we think how death has as many gates to come in by, as our body has pores, how the seeds of a thousand diseases are in our bodies, what a train of perishing principles they are made up of, how easily, while we walk amidst the creatures of God here, fire may be set to the train, and the house of clay quickly blown up, we may say there is something more astonishing in our life than in our death. And it must be a powerful providence that preserves this life of ours, as a spark of fire in the midst of an ocean of water, or as a bag of powder amidst sparks of fire flying on every hand.

Besides, how few of us are there, but sometimes there has been but as a hair-breadth betwixt death and us, by reason either of diseases or unforeseen accidents, which we could not therefore ward off. So that we might say of our preservation, This is the finger of God.

What remarkable deliverances has the Lord wrought for some by unordinary means, as Jonah preserved by a whale, and Elijah fed by the ravens!

(2.) How we are holily, wisely, and powerfully governed by Providence, our persons and actions disposed of according to his will, either in mercy or in wrath, Dan. 4:35. 'All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What dost thou?' Psal. 135:6. 'Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places.' While we sail the sea of this world, we may well perceive, that it is not we ourselves, but holy providence that guides the ship: Jer. 10:23. 'O Lord, (says the prophet), I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.' And while men will not see this, to engage them to a life of holiness, faith, and dependance on God, they are often made to

feel it, by their dashing on rocks, to the bruising, if not to the splitting of them, Isa. 26:11. 'Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see, and be ashamed.' Let me instance here but in two things, to shew that God sits King, and rules among men.

(1.) Man proposeth, but God disposeth, Lam. 3:37. 'Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?' How often are men's towering hopes levelled with the ground in a moment? Their projects are laid with all the wit and industry they are capable of, managed with all diligence and circumspection, so that they cannot see how they can misgive, but must take effect according to their wish. But he that sits in heaven, in a moment looses a pin, and all the fabric falls to the ground, their projects are baffled, their measures disconcerted, some stroke of providence, which ungodly men call an unlucky accident, mars all. This was evident in Haman's case. Sometimes it is done by an invisible hand, whereby the wheels are taken off, that they can drive no farther, Job 20:26. 'All darkness shall be hid in his secret places: a fire not blown shall consume him; it shall go ill with him that is left in his tabernacle.' How often do men find their greatest cross where they looked for their greatest comfort! and things turn about quite the contrary way to what was their design.

(2.) Man's extremity is God's opportunity, Gen. 22:14. How often does the Lord begin his work where man ends his, and can do no more? When men know not what to do, God opens a door; and when they have no firm ground of their own left to stand upon, he sets their foot on a rock, Psal. 107:27, 28. 'They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.' Their hopes are disappointed, but their fears and desperate conclusions are prevented. Something threatens them a stroke, which they see not how to escape; but an invisible arm wards off the blow; and what they look for their ruin in, there they find by an over-ruling providence, healing and upmaking, Est. 9:1. What is

most unlikely is brought about, while the fairest hopes are made like the blossom that goes up as dust. Thus God baffles men's hopes on the one hand, and their fears on the other, that they may see, there is a wheel within a wheel that moves and guides all.

SECONDLY, We may consider providences with respect to their kinds, Psal. 40:5 forecited. The wisdom of God is manifold wisdom, and produces works accordingly, Psal. 104:24. And each of them is to be observed. I will instance in these three distinctions of providence.

First, Providences are either cross, or smiling and favourable. Both ought to be observed, and may be so profitably.

1. We should observe cross providences that we or others meet with. They come not by chance, but under the guidance of a holy sovereign God, Job 5:6. 'Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.' Amos 3:6. 'Shall there be an evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' God makes himself known by them, his justice, truth, holiness, wisdom, and power, Psal. 9:16. 'The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth.' And he requires us 'to observe them, Micah 6:9. Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.' And it is a horrible provocation not to observe them, Isa. 26:11 forecited, and not to comply with the design of them; to murmur, but not kindly mourn under them, Job 35:9, 10 and 36:13. Sometimes men meet with crosses in the way of their duty, Gal. 6:17 and sometimes in the way of sin, as Jonah. The design of both is to purge away sin,' Isa. 27:9. But, without observations, the plaister is not applied to the sore.

2. Smiling and favourable providences towards ourselves or others, Psal. 40:5. Many, in their observations of providence, are like the flies that pass over the sound places, and swarm about the sores. They are still complaining of their crosses and sorrows, and will nicely reckon them up: but as to their mercies, they will not go the length of the unjust steward, of a hundred to set down fifty, Luke 16:6. They have their language, but it cannot be understood without

observation, Rom. 2:4. Dependence on God, and humility of heart, would teach us carefully to observe our mercies, Lam. 3:22. Gen. 32:10 even when we are meeting with heavy crosses, Job 1:21.

Secondly, There are great lines and small lines of providence. And,

1. We should observe the great lines of providence in signal events. Some dispensations bear such a signature of a divine hand, and so flash like lightning on men's face, that one can hardly miss to observe, but must say, as Exod. 8:19. 'This is the finger of God.' 2 Chron. 26:19, 20. 'Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand, to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests looked upon him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence, yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him.' It is rare that God leaves himself without a witness, by some such signal providences; yet such is the perverseness of the heart of man, that as the blind cannot observe the flash of lightning, even these are lightly looked at, 1 Sam. 6:9.

2. The small lines of providence. The most minute things are guided by the all-ruling hand, Matth. 10:29, 30. And if God do manage them, it becomes us to notice them. All the king's coin, from the massiest piece of gold to the smallest penny, bears the king's image and superscription, and therefore the least as well as the greatest is current in trade. So the smallest lines of providence pass current with those that keep a trade with heaven. Gideon notices his hearing a fellow tell a dream, Judges 7:13, &c. Heman, the removing of an acquaintance, Psal. 88:8 and Jacob, a kind word, the shew of his brother's countenance, Gen. 33:10.

Thirdly, There are common and uncommon providences.

1. We should observe common and ordinary dispensations, such as fall out every day in the common road of providence. These, because they are common, lie neglected: yet the 104th Psalm is penned on that subject. I have observed to you already, how providence appears in the constant revolutions of seasons, day and night; by the one the weary earth is refreshed, and by the other weary man, the night being fit for rest. The subjection of the beast, to man, by virtue of that divine word, Gen. 9:2 forecited, without which man could not have his necessary designs served. I add, that wonderful diversity of faces and features, without which the man could not know his wife, nor the parents their own children, nor the judge the criminal; so that without this there could be no orderly society, no government, commerce, &c. These are a sample of common providences, which studied might be of great use.

2. Uncommon and unordinary providences, as miracles, which are beyond the power of nature; extraordinary deliverances, judgments, discoveries of secret crimes; which are bright spots here and there interspersed in the web of providence, and challenge a peculiar regard.

THIRDLY, we may consider providences with respect to the time of their falling out. The works of providence run parallel with the line of time, and the continuance of the world, John 5:17.

1. We should observe the past dispensations of providence, Psal. 77:5. 'I have considered the days of old, (says Asaph), the years of ancient times.' An observer of providence must look off unto others, look into himself, and, with respect to himself and others, look back also.

(1.) Past providences towards others afford a large field for observation, reaching from the creation till now, Psal. 143:5. 'I remember the days of old,' says David. He remembered how the Lord dealt with Nimrod, Abimelech, Pharaoh, &c. What a chain of wise providences has encompassed the world in the several generations

thereof? what a beautiful mixture of providences has always appeared towards the church, while the mystery of God, not yet finished, has been a carrying on! What very remarkable things have fallen out in the life and death of particular persons! From all the particulars of these we might draw something for our spiritual advantage, as the see from every flower extracts her honey.

(2.) Past providences towards ourselves in particular afford also a large field, reaching from our first being till now. Look back and consider that wonderful providence that framed thee in the womb, Job 10:10, 11. The Psalmist finds himself in a transport of wonder upon this reflection, Psal. 139:14, &c. Consider how the same kind providence brought thee safe out of the womb, that the womb was not made thy grave, or that thou wast not stifled in the birth, Psal. 22:9. How thou wast provided for and preserved from the dangers in infancy, by the same kind providence, whilst thou couldest do nothing for thyself, Psal. 22:9, 10. Observe the providences of God towards thee in thy childhood, youth, middle age, and forward to the present time; and thou must say as old Jacob, Gen. 48:15. 'God fed me all my life long unto this day;' and with the Psalmist, Psal. 71:17. 'O God thou hast taught me from my youth.' Observe how God gave thee such and such education, ordered thy lot in such and such a place in his earth, and in such sort as he has done, how he brought thee into such and such company, saved thee from such and such dangers, &c.

2. We should observe the present dispensations of providence towards ourselves and others, Zech. 6:1, 2. It is a stream that still runs by us, like those rivers that bring down the golden ore, Psal. 65:11. By day nor night it ceaseth not, Psal. 19:2. Providence with the one hand bids us stoop and take on the day's load of benefits, Psal. 68:19 and with the other hand lays on the day's burden of evils, Matth. 6 ult. And therefore that is our duty, Psal. 4:4. 'Commune with your own hearts upon your bed and be still;' that having made our observations through the day, we may cast up our accounts against night.

Thus far of the objects on which we are to make observations.

III. The next general head is, to shew what we are to observe in providences. It is not enough to observe the work itself, but we must be as particular as we can about it. This is like the bruising of the spices and the pouring out of the ointment, whereby their fragrancy is best-perceived. There are these nine things I recommend to your observation.

1. The timing of providences, the great weight of a dispensation sometimes lies in this very circumstance, that then it came, and neither sooner nor later. And O the admirable wisdom that appears in thus jointing of them! Gen. 24:45. Abraham's servant prays to be guided to the woman appointed to be Isaac's wife; and in the very time Rebekah comes. Gideon in the very time when he comes near the enemy's camp, hears one of them telling his dream, Judges 7:13, &c. Uzziah is smitten in the very time when he is attempting to offer incense upon the altar of incense. And here particularly observe the timing of providences,

(1.) With respect to the frame of our spirit; for much lies in observing what frame of spirit a mercy or stroke overtakes us in. So the church observes the timing of her deliverance, that it came when they were not looking for it, Psal. 126:1. And that made it look the greater. Job observes, that his trouble came on him when he was far from security, and that made him wear it the better, Job 3 ult. Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar's trouble began when their hearts had quite forgot God, and that made the heavy hand of God the heavier. O notice carefully what frame of spirit your mercies or crosses find you in; ye will see much in that,

(2.) With respect to your circumstances. How often does kind providence catch the child at the very halting, Psal. 94:18 and an angry God set fire on people's nest just when they had well feathered it, and throw them down when they are just come to their height?

Job 20:23. So he did with holy Job, chap. 29:18. Observe it, and ye will find either a sting or a sweet ingredient in what you meet with.

There is a piece of holy foresight that an exercised Christian may have by observing the timing of a dispensation. If thou be such an one, and wouldst know whether a mercy thou hast got will last or no, how was it timed; came it to thee when thy spirit was weaned, lying at the Lord's feet? Thou hast a sure hold of it. But came it when thy spirit was upon the fret, unhumbled, unsubdued, and thou wouldest needs have it? It will stick short while in thy hand, Psal. 18:17, 18. Hos. 13:11. Fruit plucked off the tree of providence ere it be ripe, will last short while, and set their teeth on edge while they have it.

2. The beginnings and dawnings of providences, Psal. 130:6. 'My soul,' says the Psalmist, 'waiteth for the Lord, more than they that watch for the morning.' So did those mentioned, Luke 1:66. 'All they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be?' Sometimes a work that God has upon the wheel of providence will be but like the cloud, as big as a man's hand; but being observed, it will spread. Good Jacob observed the dawnings of providence in Joseph's case, though he little knew what a bright day it would end in, Gen. 37:11. It may be long betwixt the beginning and the end; but it is good to notice, as the holy penman does, the door of hope a little after the midnight of the captivity, Jer. 52:31. There is a great advantage in being able to follow the thread of providence from the beginning of it.

3. The progress of providence, endeavouring always to notice the several steps of it, Luke 2:19 and 51 and to follow the thread. For God ordinarily brings great works to pass by degrees, that so men that are weak may have the greater advantage for observation, Hos. 6:3. Mercies and strokes may be long a-working, the decree may go long ere it bring forth: but much of the wisdom of God may be seen in the several steps it takes, and the advances it makes.

4. The turns of providence. The wheel of providence is a wheel within a wheel, and sometimes it runs upon the one side, and sometimes on the other. Observe the change of the sides. For providence to our view has many turnings and windings, and yet really it is going straight forward, Zech. 14:7. It runs fast to the evening with the church there; but behold the turn, 'In the evening it shall be light.' See the turn of the wheel in Joseph's case, Gen. 41:14 in Pharaoh's taking him from prison; in the church's case, Est. 6:3, 4 in Ahasuerus's inquiring whether any honour had been done to Mordecai for his discovering a plot formed against the king's life; and in that of Hagar and Ishmael, Gen. 21:17 in the angel's calling to them out of heaven, to know what ailed them. And ye may see the wheel ordinarily turns at the brow of the hill.

5. The end of providence, James 5:11. There seemed to be many dismal circumstances in Job's case, concurring to his ruin. His substance goes, his family, his health and ease; his wife bids him blaspheme and die; his friends represent his case as that of an hypocrite; many a black thread appears in the web: but O what a beautiful piece does it appear when it is wrought out! Job 42:10, 12.

6. The mixture of providence. The unmixed dispensation is reserved for another world; there is mercy unmixed, Rev. 22:1 and judgment unmixed, chap. 14:10. But here all we meet with is mixed. There is never a mercy we get, but there is a cross in it; and never a cross, but there is a mercy in it. Observe the mixture of your mercies, to make you humble and heavenly; for the fairest rose that grows here has a prickle with it, and there is a tartness in our sweetest enjoyments. Observe the mixture of your crosses, to make you patient and thankful; for the bitterest pill God gives you to swallow has a vehicle of mercy, Lam. 3:22. 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' And wise observers will see many mercies in one cross, if they will but allow themselves to see how God could and might have made it worse.

7. The concurrence of providences. Sometimes several dispensations of providence meet together in one's case. One while there may be a meeting of several mercies together, which make a golden spot of time among them to a person. At other time several afflictions meet together, one wave comes on the back of another, till the furnace is by several coals heated seven times. Job had experience of both in his case, a train of troubles first, and a train of mercies succeeded. Jacob, when he came homeward to Canaan, had a train of troubles that waited on him. And in the case of the people of God, a very fair blink forebodes a heavy shower. The duty in that case is, 'In the day of prosperity be joyful; but in the day of adversity consider,' Eccl. 7:14. Sometimes there is a meeting of several kinds, and one gets his bed strewed with a rose and a thorn, &c.

8. The design and language of providences, Micah 6:9. They are the works of infinite wisdom, and therefore cannot be without a design. And seeing God speaks to us by his providences, and we ought to hear and obey when he speaks, we should be very careful to know the meaning of dispensations, that we may fall in with the call of providence. And the Lord takes it heinously ill if we do not, Jer. 7:7. If it be dark and doubtful let us lay it before the Lord in prayer, set it in the light of the word, and meditate on it till we find it out, Psal. 73:16, 17.

9. Lastly, The harmony of providences. There is a fourfold harmony to be observed in providences.

1st., Their harmony with the word, which they agree with as the copy with the original. The sealed book of God's decrees is opened in providences. Hence that of the opening the seals, in the Revelation. And the book of the scripture is written over again in providence, so that as in water face answereth to face, so do God's works to his word, Psal. 48:8. Providence is a most regular building, and the word is the draught of that building. Providence is a curious piece of embroidery, and the word is the pattern. So that in providence the word has been a-fulfilling ever since it was given, and still it is a-

fulfilling, and the pattern will be wrought out when the mystery of God is finished, and not till then, Mat. 5:18. And thus it is a-fulfilling, not only by the extraordinary but ordinary providences. If a man quarrel any thing in a building or embroidery, there must be a comparing it with the draught or pattern of the house or embroidery, and he will be satisfied. Psal. 73:16, 17.

Ye will never observe providences aright, if ye do not observe their harmony with the word; for the word is the instituted means of the conveyance of influences, Isa. 59 ult. By neglecting of this, some dispensations prove stumbling-blocks, over which some break their necks, Mal. 3:15. Many draw harsh and ungodly conclusions against others, whereby they only discover their own ignorance of the scriptures, and of the method of providence, Luke 13:1–5. John 9:2, 3 like Job's censorious uncharitable friends, Job 5:1.

O Sirs, learn this lesson, that all providences which you, or I, or any person or society in the world meet with, are accomplishments of the scripture. And they may be reduced to and explained by one of these five things. Either they are accomplishments of,

(1.) Scripture-doctrines, Psal. 48:8. 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.' May not every one see, that few great men are good men? Do not stumble at it; it is but a fulfilling of the scripture, 1 Cor. 1:26. 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.' That the safest condition for the soul is the medium between great wealth and pinching poverty, according to Agur's prayer, Prov. 30:8, 9. 'Give me neither poverty, nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.'—That Satan and the corruptions of the heart are sometimes most busy, when people are setting themselves to serve the Lord, agreeable to Paul's experience, Rom. 7:21. 'I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me.'—That the generality of the hearers of the gospel are not savingly wrought on by it, according to these

scripture-passages, Isa. 53:1. 'Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' Matt. 22:14. 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' And so in other cases. Or of,

(2.) Scripture-prophecies, 1 Tim. 1:18. 'This I commit unto thee, O Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee.' What astonishing providences were the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, the expulsion of the Canaanites, Cyrus' overturning the Babylonian empire, and loosing the captivity, and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans? But all these were but a fulfilling of scripture-prophecies. What an astonishing providence was the rise, reign, and continuance of the Antichristian kingdom, and the reformation of religion in many nations, after they had lain many hundreds of years under Popish darkness; These are the fulfilling of the apocalyptic prophecies. And what an astonishing providence was the introduction of the gospel into Britain, and the preservation of it hitherto, amidst so many attempts to destroy it? It is an accomplishment of that prophecy, Isa. 42:4. 'The isles shall wait for his law.' Or of,

(3.) Scripture-promises, Josh. 21:45. 'There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel: all came to pass,' Psal. 119:65. 'Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord, according unto thy word.' You see the orderly revolutions of the year, and seasons thereof; that is the fulfilling of the scripture, Gen. 8:22.—That those who have suffered loss in the cause of Christ, have been bountifully treated with so much in hand, that they have had more content and inward satisfaction in that, than any other time of their life, is a fulfilling of scripture, Mark 10:29, 30. 'There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.'—That the way of duty has been not only the most honourable but the safest way, is an accomplishment of scripture-promises, Prov. 10:9. 'He that walketh

uprightly, walketh surely.' Chap. 16:7. 'When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.'—That communion with God is to be had in ordinances, is conformable to promise, Exod. 20:24. 'In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.' Or of,

(4.) Scripture threatenings, Lev. 10:3. 'This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the congregation I will be glorified.' Hos. 7:12. 'I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.'—You may observe how dangerous it is to meddle for the ruin of the work and people of God, from that passage, Micah 4:11, 12. 'Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion. But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor.' How their faces are covered with shame that despise the Lord, from 1 Sam. 2:30. 'The Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.'—How the faster people clave to their temporal comforts, they have the looser hold, from Ezek. 24:25. 'I will take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds, their sons and their daughters.'—How people may run long in an evil way, but their foot will slip at length, from Deut. 32:35. 'Their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.'

(5.) Lastly, Or they are the parallels of scripture-examples. Psal. 143:5. 'I remember the days of old.' The serious observer will find a surprising fulness here, as in the other parts of scripture. I will instance in three very astonishing pieces of providence, which often put good men to their wits end, to know how to account for them; yet being brought to the glass of scripture-examples, such a harmony

appears betwixt the one and the other, as cannot but be extremely satisfying.

(1.) Sometimes we see men walking contrary to God, and yet providence smiling on them, and caressing them, as if they were the darlings of heaven. This has puzzled the best of men. It put Jeremiah sore to it, chap. 12:1, 2, 'Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit; thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.' It was near carrying Asaph quite off his feet, Psal. 73:13. 'Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. But, O! is there not a beautiful harmony in this with scripture-examples? How did all Israel as one man back Absalom in his rebellion? How did Haman rise till he could come no higher, unless he had got the throne? And the tyrant Nebuchadnezzar carries all before him according to his wish, &c. And scripture-doctrine unriddles the mystery, Psal. 92:5, 6, 7. 'O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not: neither doth a fool understand this. When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish: it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.'

(2.) How often do astonishing strokes light on those who are dear to God, as if God selected them from among the rest of the world, to shew his hatred of them? Eccl. 8:14, 'There is a vanity which is done upon the earth, that there be just men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.' O Sirs, this has been very puzzling to those that have met with it. But behold the harmony with scripture-examples; as in Job's case. Eli loses his two sons at one blow, his daughter-in-law dies, and himself breaks his neck. Aaron the saint of God has two sons slain by fire from heaven. The apostles were set forth as appointed for death, &c. 1 Cor.

4:9. Babylon is at ease when Zion lies in ruins. See Lam. 2:20. But further,

(3.) How often has it been the lot of some of God's people to meet with heavy strokes from the hands of the Lord, when they have been going in the way which God himself bade them take? That will try people to purpose that observe these things. But blessed be God for the Bible, that lets us see this is no untrodden path. Jacob has an express command to return to Canaan, Gen. 31:13. But O what a train of heavy trials attend him! Laban pursues him as a thief, Esau meets him with four hundred to slay him, the angel puts the knuckle of his thigh out of joint, his daughter is ravished by the Shechemites, his sons murder the Shechemites, Deborah dies, and his beloved wife Rachel dies, and Reuben defiles Bilhah. It was no wonder he said, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' Gen. 47:9.

2dly; There is a harmony of providences among themselves. It is observed of the wheels, that the four had 'one likeness,' Ezek. 1:16. The dispensations of providence of the same kind, at the greatest distance of time from one another, have a beautiful likeness to one another. And therefore Solomon observes, Eccl. 1:10. 'Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us.' Did ever any meet with such a temptation and trial as I have met with? say some. But says the apostle, 1 Cor. 10:13. 'There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man.' Was ever any afflicted at the rate that I am? says another. But hear what the apostle says. 1 Pet. 4:12. 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.' See how Solomon accounts for this, Eccl. 1:9, 10, 11. 'The Thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done, is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall their be any remembrance of things that are to come, with those that shall come after.'

(1.) They are all wrought after the same pattern, namely, the word, in the various parts thereof. The same word which was accomplished on a nation or person thousands of years ago, is accomplished on others at this very day. The same word fulfilled in one's case some time ago, may be fulfilled over again when their case comes to be the same it was then.

(2.) They have all the same specific end, to reward or punish, check, direct, &c. And where the ends are alike, it is no wonder the measures be so too. God designed to make his enemies fall, and to deliver his church at the brink of ruin, in Esther's days; and so in ours of late. Hence the plot was suffered to succeed; and when all seemed to be done, providence struck a sudden stroke, and turned the wheel on the wicked. But is there any thing new here? was it not just so in Esther's days?

It is good to observe this harmony; for by these means one sees himself in a paved road, and so may the better know how to steer his course. When one finds himself in a road where providence has led him before, he may consult his way-marks that he set up when he was there formerly, and so may travel it the more easily. And the same may he do when he is in the road, where he observes others have been before him. He may beware of the steps where they stumbled, and keep the road by which he sees they got through.

3dly, There is a harmony of providences with their design and end, Deut. 32:4. 'All his ways are judgment.' There is an admirable fitness in God's measures to reach his holy ends. The wheels were full of eyes as guided by infinite wisdom; and whithersoever the living creatures had a face looking, the wheels had a side to go on. Whatsoever God created was very good, Gen. 1 ult. that is, very fit for the end of its creation. And so are all God's works of providence exactly answering their end. It is often observed of the wheels, They turned not when they went, as a chariot must needs do, when the charioteer has driven the horses the wrong way. If they were to go to

another quarter, they were but to go on that side that looked that way all along. There is a twofold harmony to be observed here.

(1.) The harmony of every piece of providence with its particular end and design. Where there lie a great many pieces of wright-work framed and shapen by the tradesman, should a bungler take them in hand, he cannot join them; he complains that one mortise is too strait, and another too wide: but the artificer can sort them, and put each in its own place, and they answer exactly. So it is with providence. Every piece answers to its end, Eccl. 3:11. 'He hath made every thing beautiful in his time.' There is a glaring instance of this in the strokes that providence reaches sinners to punish them for particular sins, where there is such an affinity betwixt the sin and the stroke, that the sin may be read in the punishment. This is done many ways, which yet perhaps may be all reduced to one of these four. The stroke answers the sin, either,

(1.) In time, the stroke following hard at the heels of the provocation, as 1 Kings 13:4. When Jeroboam put forth his hand from the altar, saying, lay hold on the man of God, immediately his hand dried up. So God punished Dinah's gadding abroad unnecessarily, David's security by his adultery, and Peter's going into the high priest's hall. Or,

(2.) In kind, whereby God justly pays home a person in the same coin as he sinned. Adonibezek is a notable instance of this, Judg. 1:7. 'Threescore and ten kings (says he) having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table; as I have done, so God hath requited me.' David's injury to Uriah's bed is punished by Absalom's doing the same to his. So many disobedient to their parents are paid home by their children again. Some wrong and oppress others, and afterwards others deal just so by them. Or,

(3.) In likeness, the stroke bearing a resemblance to the sin. The Sodomites burn in lust, and they are burnt with fire from heaven. Nadab and Abihu sinned by offering strange fire, and they are

consumed with fire from the Lord. Jacob beguiles his father, pretending he was Esau, and Laban beguiles him with Leah instead of Rachel. As sinners measure to God in spirituals, he measures to them in temporals, 1 Cor. 11:30.

(4.) In flat contrariety. Adam will be as God, and he becomes like the beast that perisheth. David's pride of the numbers of his people is punished by the loss of seventy thousand of them. Rachel must have children, or she cannot live; she gets them, and dies in bringing one forth. The Jews crucify the Lord of glory, lest the Romans should come and take away their place and their nation; and that is the very thing that brings them.

(2.) The harmony of the several pieces among themselves with respect to their common end and design. And here there is often a beautiful mixture of contraries to make together one beautiful piece, Rom. 8:28. 'All things shall work together.' Strike the strings of a viol one by one, they make but a sorry sound; but strike them together by art, they make a pleasant harmony. The nicest piece of work lying in pieces, is but a confused heap. Joseph is sold for a slave; and he is brought into Pharaoh's presence. How contrary do these seem? but the former was as necessary as the latter to accomplish the design of providence. Haman is advanced, and the good deed done by Mordecai is forgotten, till the fittest time of remembering it. Both harmonize to Haman's ruin. Providence loses no ground in all the compasses we imagine it takes: every circumstance is necessary to the carrying on of the common end.

4thly, There is a harmony of providences with the prayers of the people of God, that have the Spirit of prayer, Gen. 32 compared with 33:10. Many dispensations of providence are the returns of prayer. This seems to be the ground of that conclusion, Psal. 41:11. 'By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me;' and puts an additional sweetness in mercies. There is one general rule as to the hearing of prayer, John 16:23. Whatsoever prayers are believingly put up in Christ's name are heard. And so we

should notice the harmony of providence with prayer. Concerning which I offer these five observations.

(1.) That where God has no mind to give such a mercy, the spirit of prayer for that mercy will be restrained, Jer. 7:16. 'Pray not thou for this people,' &c. As, upon the other hand, when God minds his people a favour, he will open their lips to pray for it, Ezek. 36:37. 'Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.' And this is no wonder, if we consider, that the Spirit of the Lord dictated the word whereof providence is the accomplishment, and the same Spirit guides the wheel of providence, Ezek. 1:20 and the same Spirit is the author of acceptable prayer, by which the sap of the word is sucked out in providence, Rom. 8:26, 27.

(2.) God hears believing prayers, either by granting the mercy itself which is sought, as Gen. 24:45 in Rebekah's appearing at the well, and drawing water as Abraham's servant had prayed for; or else the equivalent, something that is as good, 2 Cor. 12:8, 9 in Paul's obtaining grace sufficient for him. Either of these ways providence brings the answer of prayer. For God's bond of promise that faith lays hold on, and pleads in prayer, may be paid either (as it were) in money or money-worth. And the harmony betwixt prayer and providence is to be acknowledged either of the ways.

(3.) Providence may for a time seem to go quite contrary to the saints' prayers, and yet afterwards come to meet exactly. It is an astonishing piece of providence that the saints sometimes meet with, namely, that a case never is more hopeless than just after they have had a particular concern upon their spirits before the Lord about it; so that they are made to say, as Psal. 65:5. 'By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation.' But it is very usual in the Lord's dealings with his people to pass a sentence of death on their mercies ere they get them, as he did with the Israelites in Egypt, who were worse treated by Pharaoh after the application made to him to let them go, than before, Exod. 5 ult. Providence acts

like a man that is to fetch a stroke, swinging the axe back, that he may come forward with the greater vigour.

(4.) Providence often very discernibly keeps pace with the prayers of his people, that as they go up or down, so it goes. An eminent instance whereof we have Exod. 17:11 in that while Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. Hence sometimes a matter will go fairly on, while the soul is helped to believe and wrestle; but when unbelief makes the soul fag, the wheel begins to stand too. And it is no wonder this takes place, where the same Spirit is in the creature, and in the wheel.

(5.) Lastly, Providence may sweetly harmonize with the spirit of prayer, and the believer's expression in prayer, and yet not with the desires of their own spirit, which perhaps they went to lay before the Lord, Rom. 8:26, 27. The not distinguishing of these two makes many see a great jarring betwixt providence and their prayers, while in very deed there is a notable harmony betwixt them. And if they would carefully mark the words in which, under the influence of the Spirit, they presented their petitions to the Lord, they might find them wonderfully agree with the dispensation of providence, though not with the desire of their own spirits.

IV. I proceed, in the next place, to assign reasons why Christians should wisely observe providences.

1. Because they are God's works, Psal. 135:6. The world, in the framing of it, was not a work of chance; neither is it so in the management of it. Whoever be the instruments and second causes by which any thing falls out in our lot, God has the guiding of the wheels, and has a negative on the whole creation, Lam. 3:37. 'Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?' Meet me with a favourable event? we are debtors to God for it, As Abraham's servant acknowledged, on the favourable answer he received relating to Rebekah, in his bowing his head, and worshipping the Lord, Gen. 24:26. Do we meet with a cross one? It is

the finger of God, though we see a creature's whole hand in it, Amos 3:6. 'Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?' Now, seeing they are his works, they ought to be observed.

2. Because they are great works, Psal. 111:2. 'The work of the Lord is great.' Every work of providence bears the signature of a divine hand upon it. But the stamp is sometimes so fine, and our eyes so dull, that we are slow to perceive it. I told you that there are small lines of providence as well as great: but the great God does nothing but what is great and suitable to himself. Though some of his works are comparatively small, they are all great absolutely. And therefore with respect to those I called small ones, I must say to you, as Deut. 1:17. 'Ye shall hear the small as well as the great.' And good reason is there for it. For,

(1.) The smaller a piece of work is, the greater and more curious is the workmanship. Galen confessed the hand, and extolled the wisdom of God in the thigh of a gnat. An ordinary artificer will fit out a mill; but the small wath requires a curious hand, and pictures of the least size shew most of the painter's skill. That frogs should have been a plague to Pharaoh, or Herod eaten up of worms, was more admirable, than if the one had been plagued with an armed host, and the other devoured by a lion. The rats devouring hats and poppies. (Turn. hist. Prov. chap. 112.) was truly more admirable than the conquests of Alexander and Cæsar both.

(2.) Great things may be lying hid in the bosom of very minute and ordinary things. Search into the rise of that wonderful turn of providence with the church in Esther's days, and ye shall find it to be the king's falling off his rest one night, Est. 6:1 of that wonderful overthrow of the Moabites, and ye will find it a mere fancy, 2 Kings 3:22, 23. The curse of God may be in the miscarrying of a basket of bread, Deut. 28:17. And it may be big with a great mercy. They say the whale is mightily beholden to the little fish called musculus, which swims as a guide before her, without which she would be in

danger in straits and betwixt great rocks. The little cloud like a man's hand often darkens the heavens ere all be done.

3. Because they are often very mysterious works, and therefore they need observation, Psal. 92:5. It is necessary to give us right views of providence, and to keep us from mistakes. The making judgment of providences is a very tender point, wherein the best of men have gone far wrong. Was not Jacob far out when he said, Gen. 42:36. 'All these things are against me,' if we compare the promise, Rom. 8:28. 'All things shall work together for good,' &c. and the event too? Many a time the outside of providence is very unlike it inside. The greatest cross may be wrapt up in what we take to be our greatest comfort; and the greatest comfort may be inwrapt in what we call our greatest cross. Observation must break the shell, that we may look in.

4. Because they are always perfect works. They will abide the strictest search and the most narrow inquiry, Deut. 32:4. Whatever faults we find with them, as we do many, it is for want of due observation. But at length he shall gain that testimony and recantation, 'He hath done all things well,' Mark 7:37. In these his works no flaw is to be found, no mistake; nothing too much, nothing too little; nothing too soon done, nothing too late done; nothing misplaced, nothing in or over; nay, nothing done that is not best done; nothing that man or angel could make better. The world will startle at this as a paradox: but faith will believe it, on the solid ground of infinite wisdom, though sense contradict it, Isa. 38:8. Jer. 12:1. O that they who will debate this truth would come near and observe.

5. Lastly, Because they are speaking works, Micah 6:9. They speak Heaven's language to the earth, and therefore should be observed. And they speak,

(1.) Of him, Psal. 19:2. They preach to us that he is, what a God he is, how holy, just, wise, good, and powerful, &c. We may see there his perfections as in a glass. Each pile of grass speaks a God, a wise, good, and powerful one. So many creatures as there are, so many

mouths to speak of him. And it is man's work to observe and hear. When God had replenished the heavens with sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with variety of creatures, the creation was still imperfect till man was made. For what avails the musical instrument, if there be nobody to play on it?

(2.) For him. Cross providences speak for him, Micah 6:9. And favourable providences also, Rom. 2:4. Hereby sinners are instructed in the way they should go, Psal. 32:8 reprov'd, as Joseph's brethren; and comforted, as Paul was, Phil. 2:27 And, in a word, they call us from sin unto God; by them, where the word goes before, Christ knocks at the door of sinners' hearts, and calls for access.

I come now to the improvement of this doctrine. And,

I. It may serve for lamentation. Ah! may we not say, Who is wise to observe these things? Wise observers of providence are thin sown in the world; because there are few exercised to godliness. God has given us enough to observe in the public and in our private case. He is speaking by his providence to the land, he is speaking loudly at this day to the parish, to you and to me, and to every one in particular. But, alas! it is not observed to purpose. Graceless people are presumptuous, and will not observe; and even many godly are heedless, and do not observe. There are these six evidences that this wise observation of providence is very rare.

1. How many are there who see God no more in their mercies and crosses, than if they were a parcel of atheists, that did not think there were a God, or that believed no providence at all? If they get a mercy, God is not owned in it; they sacrifice to their own net. If they get a cross, they cry out by reason of the arm of the Almighty. But none saith, Where is God my Maker! In all the turns of their life and lot, they never seriously look to the wheel within the wheel.

2. How many are there to whom God in his providence is speaking plain language, that he who runs may read it, yet they will not

understand it? Psal. 82:5. God plagues the Philistines for the ark most visibly, yet they are at a loss, saying, It may be it is a chance. Balaam's ass refuses to carry him forward on the way, but he is in a rage against her. God meets sinners in their way, with speaking providences; but on they go; they do not hear, they will not be stopped. Like the dog, they snarl at the stone, but look not to the hand that threw it.

3. How few are exercised to know the design of providences that they meet with? Many signal mercies they meet with, but put not the question, What is God saying to me by these things? Many a heavy dispensation they meet with, partly by the rod's hanging over their heads, partly by its lying on them; yet they never seriously take up Job's exercise, chap. 10:2. 'I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.' These things let them come and go with as little concern to know the design of them, as if they had none.

4. How few are exercised to comply with the design of providences, to accommodate themselves to the divine dispensations? Job 33:13, 14. If men were wise observers of providence, it would be their constant practice to be answering the several calls thereof, still facing about towards it, as the shadow on the dial to the body of the sun, Psal. 27:8. 'When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' But, alas! men meet with humbling providences, but they are not exercised to mortify their pride: they meet with awakening providences, yet they are not exercised to rouse up themselves to their duty: they meet with afflicting providences in worldly things, yet they are not exercised to get their hearts weaned from the world; they meet with reproofing providences, yet they are not exercised to repent and mourn over the sins thereby pointed out. But they really strive with their Maker, and while he draws by his providence, they hold fast, and will not let it go, Jer. 6:29.

5. The little skill that people have in judging of providences. A man will readily have skill in his own trade: but it is no wonder to see

people unacquainted with things in which their business does not lie. O what commentaries on providence are in the world, that destroy the text! How miserably is the doctrine of particular dispensations perverted! Despisers of God and his ordinances are very easy; and therefore the world concludes, 'it is vain to serve God, and that there is no profit in keeping his ordinances,' Mal. 3:14. 'The proud are called happy,' ver. 15. They are best that have least to do with them. Good men meet with signal strokes: the world concludes that they are hypocrites, and they must be guilty of some heinous wickedness beyond other people, Job 5:1. Luke 13:1, 2. And a thousand such blunders there are.

6. Lastly, They rank poverty in respect of Christian experience found among professors. What a learned Egyptian said to a Greek, *Vos Græci semper pueri*, may be said to many in whom there is some good thing towards the God of Israel. Ye professors are ever children, 2 Cor. 3:1. Heb. 5:12. And what is the reason, but that we have never yet fallen close to the study of observing providences? See the text. There is a daily market in providence, but ye do no trade in it; and therefore ye are always poor. There is perhaps a lesson put in your hands this day, that ye had several years since, but ye did not learn it; and so it is now as great a mystery to you as then.

USE II. Of exhortation. O be exhorted to become wise observers of providence. O fall at length upon this piece of practical religion. Many of us have it, I fear, yet to begin; and all have need to mend their pace in it. For enforcing this exhortation, I shall give you some other points of doctrine from the words, by way of motives and direction, and so shut up this subject.

For motives take these doctrines.

1. Wise observing of providence is a rare thing in the world: Who is wise, and will observe these things, as the words may bear. And the reason is, the truth of religion is rare, and close and tender walking with God is yet rarer, Matth. 22:14 and 25:5. The most part of the

world go the broad way to destruction, Matth. 7:14 and therefore they are not concerned to observe the works of the Lord. Many Christians there are, that, alas! in these dregs of time are not exercised Christians. Up then and be doing, and conspire not with the multitude to put a slight on God's speaking by his providence, lest his fury break forth as fire en you with the rest, John 6:66.

The more rare the observing of providence is, it is the more precious. Stones may be gathered from the surface of the earth, while gold must be dug with much labour out of the bowels of it, The finest things are hardest to be won at: *Nulla virtus sine lapide*. As Christ himself had a stone rolled on him, so every grace, work, and way of Christ has one. But there is a pearl underneath; and the heavier the stone, the more precious is the pearl. Come and see in this particular.

II. They that are wise will be observers of providences, Whoso is wise, and will observe these things. And at what pitch your wisdom arrives, your observation of providences will follow it, Eccl. 2:14. The eating of the forbidden fruit cast all mankind into a spiritual madness; and the truth is, the most part of the world are in that respect as madmen, regarding neither the word nor works of the Lord. But if thou wert come to thyself, it would not be so, Luke 15:17. How long hast thou acted as a fool, in matters of greatest weight, being penny-wise and pound-foolish, careful for a mite, and in the meantime letting talents slip through thy fingers? Luke 10:41, 42.

O Sirs, how do unobserved providences aggravate our guilt, and increase our accounts! When the day shall come, the Lord will reckon with the sinner, for all the pains he has bestowed on him to bring him to himself: when his slighting the call of the word shall be aggravated with so many items of providences. How will the sinner look, when the Lord shall say, Did I not give thee such and such mercies to draw thee from thy sin? lay such and such crosses in thy way to drive thee from it? What hast thou done with all the instructive up-stirring providences I gave thee? with all the providential warnings, rebukes, &c. given thee? Remember that

passage, Prov. 9:12. 'If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.'

III. The wise observation of providences is a soul-enriching trade. They shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. This is so on two accounts, both deducible from the text.

1. That which seems the most barren piece of providence, becomes fruitful by wise observation. Some of these things in the text are very cross providences; yet even by them one shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord. Behold a holy art, whereby ye may not only gather honey out of every sweet-smelling flower, but may gather grapes of spiritual profit off the thorns of afflictions, and figs of thistles. The apostle tells us a mystery, of a pleasure in infirmities, distresses, &c. 2 Cor. 12:10. Wise observation would let you into the secret.

2. It has the promise, in the text. God has said, such a one shall know more and feel more in religion than others. 'To him that hath (i. e. improves what he has) shall be given.' And the more a man sets himself to observe, the more he will get to observe, and the more sappy will his observations be. By the wise observation of providences,

(1.) Sin and duty in particular cases is discovered. No dispensations of providence whatsoever can warrant us to go over the belly of God's commands, 1 Sam. 13:11, &c. But where two lawful things are before us, providence may point out what is present duty, and which of them we are to choose. And so the word teacheth, Psal. 32:8. 'I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.'

(2.) One gets a clear view of the divine authority of the scriptures, very necessary in such an age wherein atheism, profaneness, and immorality so much abound. For the wise observer sees the fulfilling of it exactly, and so is confirmed. While he observes providences, he

sees scripture-doctrines, promises, threatenings, and prophecies accomplished, and the parallels of scripture-examples; and so reads the truth of God's word in his works, Psal. 58:11.

(3.) Hereby a Christian is established in the good ways of the Lord, and that by those very things that make others to stagger, yea, themselves also, when they do not observe, Psal. 73:22, &c. It is the woful estrangedness to this exercise that makes so many here-away there-away professors, tossed about with every wind that rises, while amidst all these reelings the wise observer sits firm like the expert mariner among the boisterous waves, Psal. 143:5.

(4.) Hereby a Christian gets store of experiences, to lay by him for use at another time. How did Joseph sustain Egypt in time of the dearth, but by the corn laid up in time of plenty? So the Psalmist says, 'O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar,' Psalm 42:6. But for want of this some people are always from hand to mouth, always to begin; ever learning, never coming to the knowledge of the truth, Mark 6:52.

(5.) Lastly, It is a nurse to all the graces of the Spirit. It is a notable help to faith, Exod. 14 ult. A short-limbed faith will reach far up, when it stands upon experiences.—To love; see the text. Now, the love of God perceived kindles the flame of love in us.—To patience and waiting on the Lord; for observation will keep them from being hasty while the work is on the wheel, Psal. 37:2.—To hope; 'for experience worketh hope,' Rom. 5:4; for former mercies are pledges of future ones.—To contempt of the world.—To holy fear, Exod. 14 ult.—To delight and joy in the Lord, Psal. 92:4.—To self-loathing, and thankfulness, Psal. 144:1, 2, 3, &c.

And now for direction take this doctrine, There is need of true wisdom to fit a man for right observation of providence. And that wisdom is,

1. Spiritual wisdom, 1 Cor. 2:15. Carnal wisdom is no good observer of providence, as the blind man is no fit judge of colours.

2. Scripture wisdom; for the scripture is the pattern, and providence the work. They that study the language of Heaven in providence, must consult the scriptures as the dictionary for that language.

3. Practical wisdom, Psal. 111:2. Even scripture-notions floating in the head will do but little service, but sinking into the heart, reduced into practice, will be of good use here. And the more to fit you for this work, take these following lessons from the word concerning providences.

(1.) The design of Providence may sometimes lie very hid; and therefore it is good to wait, and not to be rash, Psal. 77:19.

(2.) Sometimes providence seems to forget the promise; but it is not so, but only the time of the promise is not then come, Gen. 15:4 with 16:2.

(3.) Sometimes providence seems to go quite cross to the promise, and his work to go contrary to his word. But wait ye, they will assuredly meet, Gen. 22.

(4.) Ofttimes providence favours a design, which yet will be blasted in the end, for that it was not the purpose of God, Jonah 1:3.

(5.) Ofttimes providence will run counter in appearance to the real design, and by a tract of dispensations will seem to cross it more, and more till the grave-stone appear to be laid on it. And yet, 'at evening-time it shall be light,' Zech. 14:7.

(6.) Providence many times lays aside the most likely means and brings about his work by that which nothing is expected of, 2 Kings 5:11, 12.

(7.) Lastly, Sometimes providence works by contraries, as the blind man was cured with laying clay on his eyes.

Learn to live by faith, and be frequent in meditation and self-examination, and be much in prayer.

Thus I have laid before you the duty of observing providences. May the Lord pity them that make no conscience of practising what they hear, and get nothing of all but a testimony against themselves. And may he give us all understanding in all things.

MONERGISM BOOKS

An Illustration of the Doctrines of Christian Religion by Thomas Boston, Copyright © 2020

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions August 2020 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068

