

THE  
PERFECTIONS  
OF GOD

by Wilhelmus à Brakel

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We considered in the previous chapter the two principal sources from which the knowledge of God may be derived: nature and the Holy Scriptures. We will now proceed with a consideration of God Himself. This is a task which we must undertake with trembling, so that on the one side we may avoid entertaining unbecoming thoughts about God, and on the other side we may be properly exercised in response to appropriate considerations of God. May the Lord guide me as I write and may He reveal Himself to everyone who reads this chapter or hears it read. May this chapter also be to the establishment of professors of the truth and be a rebuttal against Socinians, Arminians, and other proponents of error. Most importantly, may it guide us in the way of salvation.

As we consider the doctrine of God, we will discuss His Names, His divine essence, His attributes, and His divine Persons. Additionally, we will also consider the works of God: His intrinsic and extrinsic works as well as His works in the realm of nature and the realm of grace.

# **The Names of God**

In order to speak about God to others, it is necessary to have a word to indicate of whom we are speaking— although it should be clear that such description is not needed to distinguish God from other gods as there is but one God. As it was sufficient for the first human to have but one name, "man," there being no other creature like him, and as the Savior had no need of any other name but "Jesus," that is, Savior, there being but one such Savior, likewise God has no need for any other name but "God."

# The Name JEHOVAH

Although a name cannot possibly express the infinite Being, it has pleased the Lord to give Himself a name by which He wishes to be called—a name which would indicate His essence, the manner of His existence, and the plurality of divine Persons. The name which is indicative of His essence is *Jehovah*, it being abbreviated as *Jah*. The name which is indicative of the trinity of Persons is *Elohim*. Often there is a coalescence of these two words resulting in *Jehovi*. The consonants of this word constitute the name *Jehovah*, whereas the vowel marks produce the name *Elohim*. Very frequently these two names are placed side by side in the following manner: *Jehovah Elohim*, to reveal that God is one in essence and three in His Persons.

The Jews do not pronounce the name *Jehovah*. This practice of not using the name *Jehovah* initially was perhaps an expression of reverence, but later became superstitious in nature. In its place they use the name *Adonai*, a name by which the Lord is frequently called in His Word. Its meaning is "Lord." When this word is used in reference to men, it is written with the letter *patach*, which is the short "a" vowel. When it is used in reference to the Lord, however, the letter *kametz* is used, which is the long "a" vowel. As a result all the vowels of the name *Jehovah* are present. To accomplish this the vowel "e" is changed into a *chatef-patach* which is the shortest "a" vowel, referred to as the guttural letter *aleph*. Our translators, to give expression to the name *Jehovah*, use the name Lord, which is similar to the Greek word *kurios*, the latter being a translation of *Adonai* rather than *Jehovah*. In Rev 1:4 and 16:5 the apostle John translates the name *Jehovah* as follows: "Him which is, and which was, and which is to come." This one word has reference primarily to being or essence, while having the chronological connotation of past, present, and future. In this way this name refers to an eternal being, and therefore the translation of the name *Jehovah* in the French Bible is *l'Eternel*, that is, the Eternal One.

The name *Jehovah* is not to be found at all in the New Testament, which

certainly would have been the case if it had been a prerequisite to preserve the name *Jehovah* in all languages. To maintain that this name cannot be pronounced in Greek confirms our view rather than renders it ineffective. Even though the transliteration of Hebrew words would conflict with the common elegance of the Greek language, it is nevertheless not impossible. Since they can pronounce the names Jesus, Hosanna, Levi, Abraham, and Hallelujah, they are obviously capable of pronouncing the name *Jehovah*. I am not suggesting that the name *Jehovah* may not be used, but one may not make its use a prerequisite, as if its use were indicative of a higher level of spirituality and of superior wisdom. It is carnal to use this Name to draw attention to one's self, and thereby to display one's theological sentiments. *Jehovah* is not a common name, such as "angel" or "man"—names which can be assigned to many by virtue of being of equal status. On the contrary, it is a proper Name which uniquely belongs to God and thus to no one else, as is true of the name of every creature, each of which has his own name.

*Question:* Does Scripture ever assign the name *Jehovah* to a creature, or is this name uniquely God's own?

*Answer:* The Socinians, in order to avoid conceding that the Lord Jesus truly is God, maintain that others are also called by this name. We deny this, however; we maintain that this name uniquely belongs to God. Therefore no one but God alone may be called by this name. This becomes evident from the following:

First, it is evident when examining the composition of the word. Linguists maintain that this name has all the characteristics of a proper name. Therefore it never has anything in common with ordinary names. Since God is called by this name it is therefore of necessity the proper name of God.

Secondly, this name also cannot be applicable to anyone else but the Lord God, because it has reference to an eternal Being who is perpetually unchangeable and the origin of all beings.

Thirdly, the Lord appropriates this name as belonging exclusively to Him. "I am the Lord; that is My Name: and My glory will I not give to another"

(Isa 42:8); "The Lord is His name" (Exod 15:3); "... and they shall say to me, What is His Name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM ... I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod 3:13-14).

These words express the meaning of *Jehovah*, since *Jehovah* is a derivative of the verbal expression "I am." "But by My name JEHOVAH

was I not known to them" (Exod 6:3). This does not mean that the Lord was not known by the name *Jehovah* prior to this time, for even Eve already called Him by this name: "I have gotten a man from the Lord" (Gen 4:1).

However, the Lord had not caused them to experience the meaning of this name—that He remains the same and is immutable regarding His promises. They would now observe this as He would lead them out of Egypt and bring them into Canaan.

*Objection #1.* Created angels are also called by this name. "And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me" (Gen 16:13). He who spoke to her was an angel, for he is previously referred to as such.

*Answer:* (1) It is credible that Hagar was cognizant of the fact that either a prophet or an angel had been sent to her by God, and thus considered these words as having been spoken by God Himself. For similar reasons the shepherds of Bethlehem also stated, "Let us now ... see this thing which is come to pass, which t he Lord hath made known unto us" (Luke 2:15). Thus Hagar was not of the opinion that the angel's name was "Thou God seest me," but attributed it to the Lord who by means of this servant spoke to her.

(2) It was, however, undoubtedly the very Son of God who prior to His incarnation frequently appeared in human form and who, in reference to His mediatorial office, is called the "Angel of the Lord," the "Angel of the Lord's presence," and the "Angel of the covenant." He states in Gen 16:10, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly." This obviously cannot be accomplished by a created angel, but by God alone. Thus Hagar referred to *Jehovah* who spoke to her as "Thou God seest me," whether she



perceived that this was *Jehovah* Himself or whether she identified Him as such by means of the messenger which spoke to her.

*Objection #2.* In Gen 18 it is recorded that an angel came to Abraham, who nevertheless is referred to as *Jehovah* on several occasions.

*Answer:* It was the uncreated Angel, the Son of God Himself.

(1) He is expressly distinguished from the other two angels who are not called by the name *Jehovah*. This is true for Him alone.

(2) The Angel, being *Jehovah*, knew about Sarah's laughter in her tent (verse 13). He prophesied the birth of Isaac which from a natural perspective was impossible (verse 10). He knew that Abraham would command his children and his household to keep the way of the Lord (verse 19). All these incidents can be attributed only to God.

(3) Abraham acknowledged Him to be the Judge of all the earth (verse 25) while worshipping and supplicating before Him with utmost humility (verse 27).

*Objection #3.* Moses called the altar which he built, *Jehovah*. "And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi" (Exod 17:15).

*Answer:* Such an opinion is expressly contrary to the text. It is not stated that he called the altar *Jehovah*, for otherwise he would have terminated his statement at that point. Rather, he states, "Jehovahnissi," that is, "Jehovah is my banner." As impossible as it is that he called the altar "banner," so impossible is it that he called it *Jehovah*. It was a verbal symbol which he appropriated to the altar—similar to the manner in which proverbs are placed over gateways and doors. By this he wished to indicate that the Lord, the God of the covenant, was their help, of which the altar, a type of the Lord Jesus, was tangible evidence.

*Objection #4.* The church is called by the name *Jehovah*. "... and the name of the city (that is, *Jerusalem*) from that day shall be" *Jehovah Shamma*, "The Lord is there" (Ezek 48:35).

*Answer:* It is an expression which is used in reference to the church and

in view of this it is stated concerning her, "The Lord is there."

God dwells among her with His protection and blessing.

# The Name ELOHIM

The name which refers to God's manner of existence or His divine personhood is *Elohim*, which is equivalent to the Greek word *Theos*, and the English word *God*. It is rarely encountered in its singular form *Eloah*, and never in a dual sense. It is generally encountered in its plural form, that is, referring to two or more. This word is generally used in conjunction with a singular verb, as is true in Gen 1:1, "In the beginning Elohim created," this being in reference to one God existing in three Persons (1 John 5:7). A verb, an adjective, or a noun, however, are frequently placed in apposition to the word *Elohim* when used in its plural form, to which an *affixum pluralis numeri* is added. This becomes evident in the following passages: And *Elohim*, that is, God said *Na'aseh*: "Let us make man" (Gen 1:26); When *Elohim hith'u*, "caused me to wander" (Gen 20:13); *Elohim Kedoshim*, "is an holy God" (Josh 24:19); Remember now *Boreecha*, "thy Creator" (Eccles 12:1); *Bo'alaich 'osaich*, "thy Maker is thine Husband" (Isa 54:5); "I am *the Lord*" *Eloheka*, "thy God" (Exod 20:2).

*Elohim* is not a common name to which others have equal claim, but it is a proper name exclusively belonging to God. There is no one but the Lord who, as *Elohim*, exists in three Persons. In a metaphorical sense, however, it is also used in reference to others. Idols are called by the name *Elohim* due to the veneration and service which idol worshippers afford them. Angels are called by this name since they reflect the glory and power of God. Governments are called by this name due to the territory allotted them over which they bear rule and whereby they reflect God's supreme majesty. Many other names, descriptive and expressive of God's perfections, are attributed to Him in Scripture such as the Almighty, the Most High, the Holy One, etc.

# The Essence of God

From the names of God we now proceed to the essence of God—His existence as God. But what shall I say concerning this? Jacob once asked the Lord His name, that is, to give expression to His essence, for in early history it was customary when assigning names to give expression to the essence of a matter. He received the following answer, however: "Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after My name?" (Gen 32:29). God did not wish him to penetrate any further into the mysteries of God. In responding to Manoah the Lord said, "Why askest thou thus after My name, seeing it is secret?" (Judg 13:18). In Isa 9:6 we read, "His name is Wonderful." You, who pretend to have some knowledge of God, tell me, "What is His name and what is His Son's name if thou canst tell?" (Prov 30:4). All I can say is that the essence of God is His eternal self-existence. When Moses asked what he should tell the children of Israel if they asked him as to who had sent him, the Lord responded, *Ehjah Ascher Ehjah*: I AM THAT I AM. He added to this, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, *Ehjah*, I AM hath sent me to you" (Exod 3:14). Job said concerning the Lord in chapter 12:16, "With Him is strength and wisdom"—*Toeschia* or essence. This is a derivative of *jashah*, which in turn is derived from *jeesch*, and is expressive of steadfastness and continuity.

In the New Testament this is expressed by means of the words *theiotés*, and *theotés*, both of which are translated as "Godhead" in Rom 1:20 and Col 2:9. Additionally there are *phusis*, which is translated as "nature" in Gal 4:8, and *morphé* which is translated as "form" in Phil 2:6.

Whoever wishes to know more concerning God's essence should join me in worship as we close our eyes before this unapproachable light. It is in some measure revealed to the soul; however, we can only perceive the uttermost fringes of His Being by reflecting upon the divine attributes. At this point we will digress from the customary manner in which we treat our subject matter. We will not painstakingly deal with objections, lest we give someone the opportunity to entertain thoughts about God which are

unbecoming, and thus imitate in this respect both the Socinian and heathen and their followers. We will nevertheless deal with and respond to objections in a very discreet manner by presenting the truth in an expository and affirmative manner.

# The Attributes of God

Our gift of language belongs to the realm of the physical. Our words and expressions are derived from terrestrial objects. It is therefore a wondrous reality as well as a manifestation of divine goodness that man, in using sounds which are expressive of that which is tangible, is able to give an explanation about divine and spiritual matters by means of the vehicle of language. Our mind, being finite and having limited capacity, must function in the realm of concepts and ideas before comprehension can occur. It is the goodness of God that He adjusts Himself to our limited ability to comprehend. Since a harmonious concept of God—which would include all that could be said and thought about Him—is beyond our comprehension, it pleases God by means of various concepts and ideas to make Himself known to man. These concepts we describe and designate from a human perspective as God's essential attributes. This designation pertains to the various objects towards which God engages Himself and the deeds which He performs. We understand these attributes to be one from *God's* perspective, however, such that they can neither be divorced from the divine Being nor essentially and properly from each other as they exist in God, but are the simple, absolute Being of God Himself. We, however, relate these attributes as distinct entities by themselves. Justice and mercy are one in God, but we differentiate between them in reference to the objects towards which they are manifested, and the effects of these manifestations. Our God is inimitable and incomprehensible in His perfection, and consequently is simple and indivisible. In God there can be no differentiation between various matters, for whatever would be essentially distinct from God would render Him imperfect. Our limited comprehension must deal with each matter individually, however, and thus we assign distinct names to each attribute. Whatever we are capable of comprehending concerning God is according to truth and is consistent with His Being, but our finite understanding cannot penetrate its perfection and infinity.

The attributes or perfections of God are generally distinguished as being *communicable* and *incommunicable*. All God's attributes, being His

simple, essential Being itself, are equally incommunicable as far as their nature is concerned. This distinction is merely made for the purpose of comparison. God has created man in His image and likeness and again renews fallen, but elect, sinners according to that image, making them anew partakers of the divine nature. This does not imply that such a sinner becomes divine and is a partaker of the very being and attributes of God. From a divine perspective God is incommunicable, and finite man from his perspective cannot comprehend God's Being, the Godhead being infinite, simple, and thus indivisible. Therefore, if man in some measure were a partaker of the divine Being itself or of one of the divine attributes, he would consequently be a partaker of the entire Godhead itself, and thus man would be God. However, when we speak of the image and likeness of God in man, we are merely referring to a reflection of some of God's attributes, which are infinite, indivisible, and incommunicable in God Himself. There is some measure of congruency between these attributes and the image of God in man; however, not as if there were full equality, but merely by way of faint similitude.

Nevertheless, some attributes are such that not even the faintest reflection of them can be observed in a reasonable creature. This being true, they are denominated incommunicable attributes. Some of the attributes of God of which there is a reflection and faint resemblance in man are therefore denominated *communicable attributes*. The *incommunicable attributes* include the following: perfection or all-sufficiency, eternity, infinity or omnipresence, simplicity, and immutability. The *communicable attributes* are those attributes which relate to intellect, will, and power. We shall discuss each of these individually in order to demonstrate what manner of God our God is, whom we serve.

# The Perfection of God

The perfection of the creature consists in the possession of a measure of goodness which God has given and prescribed to all His creatures. All creatures, whatever the degree of their perfection may be, are dependent upon an external source for their being and well-being. God's perfection, however, excludes such a possibility, as He has no need of anything. No one can add to or subtract anything from His being, neither can anyone increase or decrease His felicity. His perfection consists in His self-sufficiency, His self-existence, and that He is the beginning—the first (Rev 1:8). His all-sufficiency is within and for Himself, the *El Shaddai*, *the All-sufficient One* (Gen 17:1). "Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing" (Acts 17:25); "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to Him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" (Job 22:3). "My goodness extendeth not to Thee" (Ps 16:2).

Thus there is no common ground between the perfection of God and of creatures—except in name. That which is in man is contrary to the perfection of God, however, and thus the perfection of God is an incommunicable attribute of God. The salvation of man consists in knowing, honoring, and serving God. Such is our God, who not only is allsufficient in Himself but who with His all-sufficiency can fill and saturate the soul to such an overflowing measure that it has need of nothing else but to have God as its portion. The soul so favored is filled with such light, love, and happiness, that it desires nothing but this. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee" (Ps 73:25).



# The Eternity of God

We insignificant human beings are of yesterday, have a beginning, and exist within the context of time which progresses in a sequential fashion. We cannot even begin to comprehend eternity. By way of negation, we seek to comprehend eternity by comparing it with time, stating that it is without beginning, continuation, and end. If we go beyond this in seeking to comprehend the "how" and the "why," we shall spoil it for ourselves and be in darkness. If we wish to consider the eternity of God within the context of our conception of time, then we will dishonor God and entertain erroneous notions concerning Him. All that relates to and resembles time, and all that we denominate as eternal in a figurative sense, must be totally excluded from our concept of God. We call something eternal which,

(1) continues until it has fulfilled its purpose. In this context circumcision is referred to as an eternal covenant. "... and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:13). This means that it would last until the coming of the Lord Jesus who is the embodiment of all the ceremonies, in whom all shadows had their fulfillment and consequently no longer have a function. It can also be interpreted to mean that this covenant, being confirmed by circumcision, is an eternal covenant.

(2) The word eternity can also be expressive of the duration of a condition which is in force as long as man lives. "... he shall be thy servant for ever" (Deut 15:17).

(3) The word eternity can also refer to something that has stability and endures. In this context hills are referred to as being eternal (Deut 33:15; cf. Gen 49:26).

(4) The word eternity is used in reference to that which will never end, such as felicity in the hereafter. "I give unto them eternal life" (John 10:28).

We use the word eternity in reference to all these things. There is,

however, neither commonality nor resemblance with the absolute eternity of God. We cannot refer to it any differently than to define it as the existence of God which is without beginning, continuation, and ending, all of which are simultaneously true. This is expressed in the word *Jehovah*, which defines a being for whom the past, present, and future are a simultaneous and concurrent reality—He is the One who is, who was, and who shall be. God's Being is eternity and eternity is God's Being. It is not fortuitous as time is in relation to the creature. There can be no chronology within the Being of God since His Being is simple and immutable. Such likewise cannot be true in reference to God's eternity; eternity is the very Being of God. The Holy Scriptures refer to God as the eternal God. "And Abraham ... called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God" (Gen 21:33); "The eternal God is thy refuge" (Deut 33:27). It is stated concerning God that He is the beginning and the end (Rev 1:8). Even though these are distinguished in God, they are a simultaneous reality. There is no intervening time nor anything that remotely resembles the progression of time. "... from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God" (Ps 90:4); "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17); "They shall perish ... but Thou art the same" (Ps 102:26-27); "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past" (Ps 90:4). Thus we conclude that God and time have nothing in common.

Even when years and days, or past and present time are attributed to God, and He is called the Ancient of Days and other similar

expressions, such is merely done from man's viewpoint. The reason for this is that we, insignificant human beings incapable of thinking and speaking about eternity in a fitting manner, may by way of comparison—which in reality is a very unequal comparison—comprehend as much of eternity as is needful for us to know. Nevertheless, in doing so we must fully divorce God from the concept of time.

God unchangeably exists while time is in progression. God was yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow. However, God does not measure time as the creature measures time, as He transcends time and is external to the concept of time. If He has wrought something in the past, will do it tomorrow, or is active at the present moment, this does not suggest that a

change of time occurs in God. Such an apparent change merely relates to the objects of His activity and the purposes which He has accomplished.

Therefore, do not elevate yourself beyond the reach of your comprehension, and do not limit God by your human conceptions. Acknowledge and believe God to be the One who dwells in incomprehensible eternity; lose yourself in this eternity; worship that which you cannot comprehend; and with Abraham call upon the name of the eternal God.

# The Infinity and Omnipresence of God

A being, be it of a spiritual or a corporal nature, is considered finite if its existence has well-defined parameters. Such is true for the entire structure of heaven and earth as well as of every individual creature. The world is finite, and even though there is no other celestial body by which the parameters of the earth are defined, preventing it from expanding itself beyond its current limits, these parameters are nevertheless determined by its own mass. The earth's measurement from its center to its circumference is well-defined, and beyond this circumference is nothing but space which itself has its own parameters. God's Being, however, is inherently without any parameters, neither are any imposed upon Him externally and thus God in His Being is infinite in the absolute sense of the word.

Occasionally, when referring to something of which the limits are not known, we refer to infinity in a hypothetical sense, as when we speak of the total number of grains of sand, blades of grass, or stars. We also define as infinite that to which something can always be added, which for instance is true of a number. Regardless of how long one counts, the ultimate sum will either be even or uneven, a reality which changes as soon as one number is added—even if you were to count during your entire lifetime. When we define God to be infinite, however, we do so in the literal sense of the word, thereby conveying that His Being is truly without any parameters or limitations. His power is infinite, His knowledge is infinite, and His Being is infinite; and it is this latter truth which we are discussing here.

Eternity being an incomprehensible concept for us as creatures of time, as local and finite creatures we are equally incapable of understanding God's infinity. We relate to infinity by thinking of a vast expanse. God's infinity, however, excludes the concepts of quantity, dimension, and locality. In order to have any comprehension of the infinity of God's Being, we must, for instance, make a hypothetical comparison to a vast expanse while simultaneously denying such to be characteristic of God.

The infinity of God's Being is a logical consequence of,

(1) the perfection of God's Being. Whatever is limited and finite is imperfect, since expansion of parameters implies the approximation of a higher degree of perfection. Consequently, something without limits is better and excels in perfection than that which has limits.

(2) It being evident that God is infinite in power—something which cannot be attributed to a finite being. (3) God Himself bearing witness to this by His Spirit: "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable" (Ps 145:3); "the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee" (1 Kings 8:27).

One of the friends of Job expressed himself concerning God's infinity, both as to His knowledge and His Being. "Canst thou by searching

find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job 11:7-9).

Infinity and omnipresence are identical in God. When we speak of His omnipresence, however, we are merely referring to the infinite God in regard to His presence at any given location. We are not defining His parameters as we would with corporal entities which have well-defined spacial limits. He is also not limited as other spiritual beings are who can be only at one place at one time. Rather, the reference is to the fact that with His Being He permeates everything, albeit not in a local, corporal, and dimensional sense.

God, by virtue of the hypostatic union in Christ, is in heaven with His glory, as well as in His church with His grace. He dwells in every believer with His life-giving Spirit, and is in hell with His just wrath. He is present everywhere in the created universe, not only by virtue of His power and knowledge—also in His Being, such not being partial or dimensional—but because His Being is infinite, simple, and indivisible. This is as incomprehensible for the creature as is God's eternity. We must therefore close the eyes of our understanding as to the manner of His existence and

believe that God is such as He has revealed Himself in nature and in Scripture.

Nature itself instructs every man in this regard, and especially those who apply themselves with some diligence to become acquainted with God and religion. Such persons will become conscious of the omnipresence of God so that everyone simultaneously, regardless of what his location may be at any given time upon earth, not only will acknowledge God to be omnipotent and omniscient but also that He is near him in His essential presence. Even intelligent men in the secular realm have expressed themselves forcefully in reference to this reality.

God states very clearly in His Word, "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool" (Isa 66:1). When such a statement is made in reference to a king, it is indicative of his immediate and corporal presence. Consequently, this is also true when God refers to Himself in such human terms in order that we might understand and acknowledge the presence of the very essence of God both in heaven and on earth. "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? ... Do not I fill heaven and earth?" (Jer 23:23-24). "... though He be not far from every one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28). Add to these the texts which indicate that God not only fills heaven and earth, but infinitely transcends both (1 Kings 8:27).

When it is stated that God is in heaven, this does not exclude His omnipresence upon earth. Nowhere can God either be confined or excluded. God manifests His glorious presence in a far more evident manner in heaven—it being His throne—than upon earth, which is His footstool. By using this manner of speech the lofty and exalted glory by which God transcends all creatures is made known to us. This is acknowledged by man when he prayerfully lifts his heart and eye upward, acknowledging thereby that God also is invisible and alien to all that is upon earth.

When it is stated that God was not present in the strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire, but rather in a still small voice (1 Kings 19:11-12), the reference is not to His essential presence, but to the manner in which He addressed Elijah and revealed Himself to Him. When it is

stated that God is not with someone or that He would not go up in the midst of Israel (Exod 33:7), the reference is to the manifestation of His favor rather than to His essential presence. It is not unbecoming for God to be present in various vile and offensive places for His presence is not characterized by corporal involvement, but He is present as the energizing, preserving, and governing cause, just as He is in the ungodly and devils as an avenging Judge. The sun illuminates everything without being contaminated in the least. An object cannot contaminate a spirit, much less the infinite God. Whatever God deems suitable to be created and to be governed, He also deems suitable for His essential presence. God reveals Himself in the world by means of His works, not as a God who is afar off, but as a God who is invisibly present.

Believer, since the Lord is always present with you, compassing your pathway and your lying down, besetting you behind and before (Ps

139:3-5), be careful to refrain yourself from doing anything that would be unbecoming of His presence. Set the Lord always before you. Acknowledge Him in all your ways. Fear Him. Humble yourself before Him. Walk in all reverence and humility before His countenance, for to sin in the presence of God greatly aggravates the sin committed. The presence of people serves as a restraint against the commission of many sins, and if the presence of God does not accomplish the same, one reveals himself as having more respect for people than for the majestic and holy God. What a despising and provoking of God this is! Therefore, let your reverence for the presence of God prevent your sinning against Him and let it motivate you to live a life pleasing to the Lord.

On the other side, believer, let the reality of God's presence be your continual support and comfort in all the vicissitudes of life. The Lord is at hand; He is a fiery wall roundabout you, and no one will be able to touch you contrary to His will. If something befalls you, seek refuge in Him and encourage yourself with His presence. How this revived David's soul! "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me" (Ps 23:4). The Lord is pleased to comfort His children in this manner. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither

shall the flame kindle upon thee" (Isa 43:2).



# The Simplicity of God

As we can neither comprehend the eternity of God because we are creatures of time, nor the non-dimensional infinity and omnipresence of God because we are finite and local in nature, so we also, being composite creatures, are not able to comprehend the simplicity of God. Since we must recognize, however, that all composition implies imperfection, dependency, and divisibility, we may not think of God as being composite even in the remotest sense of the word. Thus, we acknowledge God in every respect to be perfect and of singular essence.

Philosophers recognize various types of composition, all of which we deny to be applicable to God. Among these are:

First, *a logical composition, (ex genere et differentia)*, that is, in reference to gender, nature, and distinction. For example, both man and beast are animals as both have an animal nature in common and thus belong to the animal kingdom. In addition to their animal nature, however, there is also something by which they are distinguished from each other. Man possesses reason in addition to his animal nature, whereas a beast is without reason and intelligence. However, God has nothing in common with any creature, and by virtue of His Being, transcends all His creatures while remaining distinct from them. Whenever God is referred to as a Spirit, the word "spirit" does not imply that God and angels have a common nature of which both God and angels would be equal partakers. The resemblance is one of nomenclature only. God is called a Spirit in order that we would perceive Him as being invisible.

Secondly, *a physical or natural composition*, consisting of three elements: substance and form, a subject and its incidentals, and individual parts.

(1) *Substance and form.* Everything which has been created with a tangible form has, in addition to the matter of which it consists, something which identifies such a created object to be gold, a tree, an

animal, or a human being. Far be it from us to entertain such notions about God who is without a body and infinitely removed from every possible notion of any physical characteristics, no matter how he is viewed by man. In order to distinguish Him as such, He is referred to as a Spirit. Such a composition as to substance and form simply does not exist relative to God.

(2) *A subject and its incidentals.* An angel, for example, has the nature of an angel, and in addition to this nature has a mind, intelligence, a will, holiness, and power. These qualities are not the angel himself, but they are complementary to his being. His being is the subject of these qualities, making him complete. Far be it from us to think of God in such a fashion. God is perfect in His Being and His perfection cannot be improved upon in any way. All that may be discerned in God is God Himself. His goodness, wisdom, and omnipotence is the good, only wise, and omnipotent God Himself.

(3) *Individual parts.* Parts by way of composition constitute a whole—such as is true for objects. Such is clearly not the case with God for God is a Spirit who has nothing in common with a body. If such were the case, there would be something less than perfection in God, as the composite whole would be more nearly perfect than each individual part. Thirdly, *a metaphysical or supernatural composition.* Three aspects must be considered.

(1) *Ex essentia et existentia*, that is, there is an essential distinction between the essence and the actual existence of something. It is possible to comprehend the one without the other. It is possible to describe a rose and to comprehend what it is, even during the winter when no roses are present. Thus, we distinguish between the essential nature of a rose and its actual existence. God's Being, however, is His actual existence, and His actual existence is His Being, a truth which is conveyed by His name *Jehovah*. One cannot be distinguished from the other and one cannot be comprehended without the other, for they are one.

(2) *Ex potentia et actu*, that is, there is a distinction between the potential and the actual deed. In discussing potential, we distinguish between active and passive potential. Active potential refers to the ability to

accomplish something, even though one is not accomplishing it at the time. In the creature such potential is distinguished from the deed, and the excellence of a creature in action supersedes that of one who has the potential for such activity. Such, however, is not the case with God; in Him the potential for activity and the act itself are one. God is one singular, active force. Distinction and change in this realm can only be perceived in the creature which has been created, is maintained, and is governed. Such, however, is not true for God who is the Creator, Maintainer, and Governor. Latent potential—or to express it in more intelligible language—the possibility of existence, is to be found in creatures only, such being true in a threefold manner. In the first place it refers to something which as yet does not exist but which by virtue of the exertion of effort could be brought into existence. It also refers to something which already exists, but which by the exertion of effort can be changed. Thirdly, it refers to something that can be annihilated. It is obvious that all of this does not apply to God.

(3) *Ex essentia et subsistentia*, that is, there is a distinction between the nature or being and the existence or personhood. *Subsistentia* or the manner of existence is complementary to the existence of a being itself, by which it possesses something which makes it uniquely distinct from another being, having a unique existence of its own. Thus, we conclude the manner of existence to presuppose a being. *Suppositium*, or the existence itself, refers to that which can in nowise be communicated to someone else, nor can exist in someone else either in part or form. Something having such a distinct existence and being endowed with reason we refer to as a person. A person is an indivisible and independent entity endowed with a rational nature. A person is either a human being such as John, Peter, or Paul; or an angel such as Gabriel or Michael; or a divine Person, such as the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost.

In every created person there is a composition of essence, actual existence, and manner of existence. One is not the same as the other, but is distinguished from the other. Consider, for instance, the human nature of Christ, in which we can discern both essence and actual existence, but not a human personality. As such it has its existence within the Person of the Son of God, for otherwise Christ would consist of two persons: a

human and divine person. He is, however, one divine Person. In God there is no composition of being and personhood, as every form of composition implies imperfection. Each divine Person is not to be distinguished from either the divine Being or from the other Persons as we would distinguish between various matters, nor as between a matter and the manner in which it functions, such being distinct from the matter itself. We insignificant human beings, however, try to comprehend this by relating to or defining a manner of existence. This does not indicate that there is composition in His Being, but merely enables us to distinguish between various matters related to God's Being. Whatever we cannot comprehend of it, we believe and worship, as it pleases God to reveal Himself in such a fashion. Believers, being illuminated by the Spirit of God, know as much concerning this attribute as is necessary to cause them to adore and glorify God, as well as to experience joy, confidence, and sanctification.

Scripture makes reference to this simplicity when referring to God in an abstract manner such as when it speaks of the Godhead, divinity, or when it refers to God as light, "God is light" (1 John 1:5); truth, "God of truth" (Deut 32:4); and love, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). None of this can be stated concerning a creature.

When man is referred to as having his origin in God, belonging to God's generation, being God's son, or being a partaker of the divine nature, and when God is said to be the Father of spirits, this does not imply that man is of the same essence as God, as this would mean that God's Being is communicable. In such cases the reference is to creation and regeneration by which man receives some resemblance to some of the attributes of God. This creative act does not bring about a change in God but in the creature.

Similarly, the decrees, when viewed internally in God, are the decreeing God Himself. Also the relationship which God establishes relative to His creatures does not imply a change or composition within God, as this relationship is merely external and adds nothing to the essence of God's Being. Whenever human limbs, hands, eyes, and a mouth are attributed to God, such human terminology occurs in order that we insignificant human beings may comprehend the operations of God by comparing

them to the manner in which we use those limbs, etc. Whenever anger, love, and similar passions are attributed to God, we must have the consequences and results in view such as occur when we have similar passions.

# The Immutability of God

Mutability has reference either to a created entity, to incidents or circumstances, or to the will. Every creature in one way or another is subject to change and has within itself the potential for change or to be changed. The Lord our God, however, is absolutely, and in all respects, immutable in both His essence and His will. Yes, even the possibility of change is utterly foreign to God. This is evident from the following:

First, it is conveyed by the name of God, *Jehovah*, which means "eternal Being." By means of this name God shows Himself to be immutable. "... but by My name JEHOVAH was I not known to them" (Exod 6:3), that is, I have made a promise to them concerning Canaan, which, however, I have not fulfilled in their time and have not shown to them in very deed that I am immutable, but I will now show to you that I am *Jehovah*, the immutable God, by fulfilling my promise to you, their seed.

Secondly, add to this these and similar texts. "Of old hast Thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall be changed: but Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end" (Ps 102:25-27); "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal 3:6); "The Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17); "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (Heb 6:17); "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for He is not a man, that He should repent" (1 Sam 15:29); "For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa 14:27).

Thirdly, the following reasons also make the immutability of God evident. All change occurs either because the principle of change is inherent in us, or because our nature is such that someone else is capable of bringing about a change in us.

God, however, is eternal, transcendent, and the original cause of all things. All change is either the result of a lack of wisdom, the perception of which necessitates a response to the error one has made in consequence of this; or it is precipitated by a lack of foreknowledge, by which one could not anticipate what would be encountered and thus is confronted with the unexpected. God, however, is supreme Wisdom Himself, the only wise God, who has foreknowledge concerning all things. "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). He is cognizant of all that man will do or refrain from doing by the exercise of his free will, as man in all his motions is dependent upon God. He knows our thoughts from afar, our downsitting and uprising, as well as our speaking and silence. Change can also occur when we lack the ability to carry out our intent, being unable to overcome a given obstacle. God, however, is the Almighty, wonderful in counsel and excellent in working; consequently, not even the minutest change can take place with God.

Additionally, it should be considered that if God were to change, He would improve Himself or gain in wisdom. Neither possibility can

be entertained concerning God as He always is and remains the infinitely perfect One.

It is according to God's will that certain things will change. This, however, does not bring about a change in His will. When repentance is attributed to God, this does not suggest a change in God Himself, but rather a change in activity (in comparison to a prior moment) towards the objects of that activity, this change being according to His immutable decree. Whenever God issues a promise or a threat which He does not carry out, this merely indicates that there was a contingency, either expressly stated or implied, which would determine whether or not the circumstances would take place. This fact was already known to God by virtue of His omniscience and His counsel. The fact that God is Creator, Maintainer, Governor, and Reconciler, and is a Father, does not indicate that any change occurs in God, but rather in the creatures. It conveys the relationship which God thereby establishes with His creatures. This relationship, however, does not suggest a change in the parties involved in this relationship.

Since God is immutable, how you should fear, unconverted sinner! For all the threatenings and judgments, both temporal and eternal, with which you have been threatened, will certainly and unavoidably come upon you if you do not repent.

Believers, be comforted by the immutability of the Lord, for all promises of which you are the heirs will most certainly be fulfilled. Not one of them will fall upon the earth nor be disannulled, even though the circumstances appear to be strange and so contrary to them and, in your opinion, the fulfillment of the promises is postponed so much longer than ought to be the case. God leads His children in these ways to cause them to trust in His Word alone. He makes the promise obscure and causes the opposite to transpire in order to demonstrate subsequently the immutability of His counsel that much more clearly. "... in those is continuance, and we shall be saved" (Isa 64:5). This much for the incommunicable attributes.



# **The Communicable Attributes of God**

The communicable attributes of God are not less infinite and are the simple. God Himself, as is also true for the incommunicable attributes. They are neither denominated "communicable attributes" because God communicates these attributes themselves nor because there is any equivalence between the Creator and the creature. Rather, He has communicated a slight resemblance of these attributes to His rational creatures. These communicable attributes can be organized under three headings: intellect or knowledge, will, and power.

# The Knowledge of God

Though rational creatures possess a measure of knowledge, there is nevertheless an infinite difference between God's knowledge and the knowledge of His creatures, both in reference to the mode as well as to the objects of their knowledge.

First, let us consider *the mode of God's knowledge*. Man acquires knowledge by means of deliberation and rational deduction, deducing and drawing conclusions by viewing one fact in reference to another. The initial knowledge concerning an object is acquired by way of *species sensibiles*, that is, sensible observations, which are made regarding physical objects through the agency of the five senses, and by means of *species intelligibiles*, that is, intellectual observations which are made through the agency of one's intellect regarding matters about which man reasons. The knowledge of God, on the contrary, neither has its origin in the creature nor does it flow from the creature to God; rather it flows from God Himself to the creature. God does not become acquainted with things after the fact by virtue of their existence and function; rather, He knows matters in advance so that they will exist and function according to His decree. God does not decree His workmanship by considering cause and effect. He does not acquire His knowledge concerning His creature through the process of research and rational deduction; rather, He knows them since He has decreed that they should exist and operate. His cognizance of everything is full and instantaneous in consequence of who He is. He views everything simultaneously, and each matter in particular; this pertains even to the minutest detail of its existence. Beyond this we cannot speculate about the mode of God's knowledge. We must confess, "such knowledge is too wonderful for me" (Ps 139:6).

Secondly, *The object of God's knowledge*. Also here there is an infinite difference between the knowledge of men and the knowledge of God. Man is knowledgeable about only a few things, and that which he knows is only known superficially, as he lacks the capacity to uncover the most profound and essential substance of a matter. "For we are but of

yesterday, and know nothing" (Job 8:9); "Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him?" (Job 26:14).

(1) On the contrary, God knows Himself, and that perfectly. "... the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:11).

(2) God is cognizant of His omnipotence, knowing that He can fully perform all that He would desire to do. All that he would desire to do can indeed come to pass and be accomplished by Him. This we would refer to as the possibility of all things. The Lord Jesus refers to this when He states, "I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt 3:9). This is generally referred to as *scientiam simplicis intelligentiae*, that is, knowledge in its most simple or essential form.

(3) God is also cognizant of all things which currently exist or will exist—that is, prior to their existence. This is not merely true in a general sense, but it relates to each individual matter or action as if each were singular in its existence. This knowledge is generally referred to as *scientia visionis*, that is, visionary knowledge as it relates to the perception of things which shall be or currently exist.

God clearly testifies in His Word that He does not merely have a general knowledge concerning matters, but a specific knowledge of each individual matter. Such is not only confirmed by texts which refer to God's knowledge in a general sense, such as, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18); "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb 4:13); "God ... knoweth all things" (1 John 3:20)—also by texts which refer to God's knowledge concerning each matter individually, such as, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight" (Heb 4:13); "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt 10:30); "He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names" (Ps 147:4).

(1) The Lord observes and is cognizant of all things, both great and small. He knows the heart of kings (Prov 21:1) and takes notice of every sparrow (Matt 10:29).

(2) He is cognizant of all good and evil things, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps 90:8).

(3) The Lord is cognizant of all secret things, "Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men" (1 Kings 8:39); "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man" (Ps 94:11); "for He knew what was in man" (John 2:25).

(4) The Lord has an infallible knowledge of all future things which will transpire due to the exercise of man's free will, and therefore knows all things which will occur relative to man. God knows everything, for all His works are known to Him from eternity and are naked and open before Him. This becomes evident from the following:

First, the word "all" comprehends everything. It includes all future events, including those which occur as a result of the exercise of man's free will. If God were not cognizant of such events, He would be ignorant concerning many things. The contrary is true, however, for He knows everything.

Secondly, what is more frequent in occurrence and more dependent upon the exercise of man's free will than his sitting down and rising up, as well as the function of thought and speech? The Lord knows all this from afar, however, even before one thinks or speaks. "... for I knew that thou wouldest deal very treacherously" (Isa 48:8; see also Ps 139:1-2); "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee" (Jer 1:5); "For I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (Ezek 11:5).

Thirdly, this is true for all prophecies, even those which refer to such events which could only come about as a result of the exercise of

man's free will. Examples of this are too numerous to mention here; the entire divine revelation exemplifies this. The Lord Jesus Himself says, "Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He" (John 13:19).

Fourthly, nothing exists or comes to pass apart from the operation of

God. God sustains everything by His omnipotent and omnipresent power. Nothing can move without divine cooperation and thus everything transpires according to His decree, be it either by the Lord's initiation or permission, directing things in such a manner that they accomplish His purpose. Thus it becomes evident that the Lord has prior knowledge concerning all things. You will comprehend this with more clarity and be less confused if you keep in mind that God is omniscient and has decreed all that transpires. His knowledge is not derived from existing matters and secondary causes as is true for man. Keep in mind that from God's perspective, who is the first cause of all things, everything is an absolute certainty even though it appears to be uncertain when viewed from the perspective of secondary causes. From God's perspective there are no contingencies; such is only true from man's perspective. Thus, in defining the freedom of the will we must not think of it as functioning independently from God, on an equal plane with His will, or as a neutral entity; rather, this freedom is a function of necessity. Thus, the freedom of the will does not contradict the certain foreknowledge of God. Man, without coercion and by arbitrary choice, performs that which God has most certainly decreed, and of which He was cognizant that it would occur.

God speaks in the manner of men when it is recorded that He tries man in order to know what is in him, and also when He states, "... now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen 22:12). He had knowledge of this already from eternity. He also speaks in the manner of men when it is recorded that He waits whether man will perform a particular duty. He does this in order to exhort and warn man that he must be aware that God takes notice of his actions; it is not that He does not know what will occur.

Jesuits, Arminians, and others who fanatically insist that man has a free will have concocted a *scientiam mediam*, that is, a mediate knowledge which would positionally be between the absolute, natural, and essential knowledge of God by which God is cognizant of the full potential of all things. His volitional, visionary knowledge would then be that knowledge whereby He has a particular and detailed knowledge of all things—having decreed them—as far as circumstances and occurrence are concerned. Such a will, being in a mediate position relative to both [essential and

visionary knowledge], would be a means whereby God knows one thing by means of the other, that is, that which takes place by means of causes and circumstances.

They define this mediate knowledge to be the knowledge of God whereby He is cognizant of future events which are not yet considered as certain, since no determination has yet been made by presupposing in what manner these events will be shaped by the exercise of man's free will. Let me illustrate by way of hypothesis. God, in envisioning that man would be created in perfection and would be confronted with a particular temptation of Satan, could foresee that man in the exercise of His free will would abuse His gifts. God further envisioned, after man had fallen, that the gospel would be proclaimed to him, urgently motivating him in various ways to believe it, this taking place at such a moment when man would be most pliable, attentive, and properly prepared. Thus, He would be enabled to foresee and know who would and who would not repent, believe, and persevere until the end of life. Such reasoning could also be applied to other situations in which angels or men would appear to exercise their free will in one way or another. The foolishness of such a hypothesis will be evident from the following:

First, if God had such a *mediate* knowledge, all knowledge of God relative to the actions of men would be fraught with uncertainty and mere assumptions. Even if every imaginable circumstance needed to induce man to a certain action would be brought into play, man, in their opinion, would still be free to do as he pleased. They reason that man would not be limited by a necessary cause, and thus it would be uncertain what he would do. Consequently, God's knowledge relative to such actions would be of a contingent nature. Far be it from us to entertain such a notion concerning an omniscient God!

Secondly, such mediate knowledge implies that God has no control over the voluntary actions of man. Such an assumption is an absurdity in reference to both the Creator and the creature. As far as the future is concerned, such voluntary actions would have no causal relationship

to God at all, as there would neither be any decree concerning them, nor could they have been a contingent element of any decree. Then such

actions would proceed entirely from man in the exercise of his free will. Indeed, in such instances God would be dependent upon the creature, unable to decree anything concerning man apart from the intervention of man's free will. Consequently, all decrees could only be executed upon the condition that it would please man to cooperate, he being lord over his free will and thus unable to be restricted by anyone but himself. Their view [the Jesuits and Arminians] implies that all that God has decreed is uncertain because man by the exercise of his free will is able to change it.

To be Lord over man's volitional action, it is not sufficient that God have control over the circumstances which can sway the activity of man's will, either causing or not causing certain things to take place, or to be in a given condition. These circumstances must not be contingent upon the exercise of man's free will for then it would be in man's power to dictate the circumstances either verbally or physically relative to other individuals. Apart from such a consideration, it must be recognized that such power and control would only involve the circumstances and situations which would induce man to exercise his free will but would not extend to the will itself. It would remain free and thus, independent from God, maintain control over itself rather than being subject to His control. Even if they allow that both the will and its freedom have their origin in God, they nevertheless maintain that man remains his own master relative to the exercise of his free will. Thus, he is not dependent upon God, nor can be controlled by Him. Such are the absurdities which follow from holding to a view that God has a mediate knowledge of things. Having concluded this, it must also be posited that consistent with this view such divine knowledge is merely related to circumstances which occur to man; this would then have an effect upon his will. This in turn would result in a given event, in response to which God would subsequently establish His decree. Such reasoning changes the very nature of both God and man as it consequently removes the creature from the realm of God's control. Since all of this is nonsensical, we conclude the existence of such mediate knowledge to be an absurdity.

*Objection #1:* In 1 Sam 23:11-12 we read that the Lord, in response to David's question, replied that "He [Saul] will come down," and they [the men of Keilah] "will deliver thee up." This was not according to God's

decree, although He was cognizant of it by means of His mediate intervention relative to the exercise of man's free will.

*Answer:* This was not a prediction concerning a future event, but rather a revelation about a current reality which from a human perspective could have resulted in an event which as yet had not occurred. Since God had not decreed this event, however, He consequently knew that it would not occur. David inquires about that which is hidden from him so that he may decide whether to stay or flee. God revealed to him that Saul would come down to Keilah and that the hearts of the men of Keilah were not inclined towards him; therefore, they would determine to deliver David to Saul when he would come down. Saul had already prepared himself accordingly and the hearts of the men of Keilah were already set against him. God revealed this to David, and upon viewing this from a human perspective, he could conclude that it was in his best interest to flee. Since God decreed the ultimate outcome of the event, He also decreed the means which would lead to this outcome. Thus, if one views this text relative to the outcome of events, it follows that God's knowledge concerning the ultimate outcome of events is a result of essential omniscience. It is the result of God's singular and comprehensive knowledge, whereby He is cognizant of every possibility, rather than an imaginary, mediate knowledge by which He would decree in response to the activity of man.

*Objection #2:* "... and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things" (2 Sam 12:8); "Oh that My people had hearkened unto Me, and Israel had walked in My ways! I should soon have subdued their enemies" (Ps 81:13-14). God had foreseen how David as well as Israel would conduct themselves, and thus concluded what would or would not occur to them even though He had not decreed it to be such. Consequently, there is such a thing as mediate knowledge.

*Answer:* It has pleased God to make conditional promises relative to the practice of godliness. He who lives godly will receive them and he who does not will not receive them. God makes the promise in order to incite man to action and man acquiesces and acknowledges it to be his duty. The obedience to such exhortations, however, is dependent upon the gift of divine grace which God either does or does not give according to His



decree. David and Israel did not fulfil the necessary conditions, and thus the fulfillment of the promise was withheld from

them. God had decreed that David would not receive beyond what had been given him and that He would not deliver Israel from its enemies. By virtue of this decree God knew that they would not receive blessings beyond those which were already theirs. This was according to His decree rather than in response to their behavior. God is cognizant of the result of all conditional promises by virtue of His decree, and not by virtue of man's exercise of his free will.

*Objection #3:* "And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (2 Kings 13:19). The frequency with which the Syrians would be smitten was dependent upon the frequency with which the earth was smitten. From the one event God concluded the other, which He evidently had not decreed.

*Answer:* Here is not even the slightest reference to mediate knowledge. What was the relationship between the smiting of the earth and the smiting of the Syrians? God had revealed to Elisha that Joash, the king of Israel, would defeat the Syrians just as often as he would smite the earth with arrows. He smote the earth three times in accordance with divine government, for God had decreed that Joash would defeat the Syrians three times. The prophet, being desirous of the total destruction of the Syrians who were the enemies of God's people, became angry that Joash had not smitten the earth five or six times. This does not suggest that the ultimate outcome was dependent upon the frequency with which the earth would be smitten. The prophet, not being cognizant of the counsel of God, merely had a general revelation that the Syrians would be defeated and that the frequency of these defeats would be revealed by the Lord by means of Joash's smiting of the earth. It was thus his wish that Joash would have smitten the earth more frequently so that the number of Syrian defeats would have exceeded three.

*Objection #4:* "... if the mighty works, ... which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago ..."

(Matt 11:21).

*Answer:* The manner of speaking here is hyperbolic, which, rather than being conclusive, merely underscores something by way of overstatement, as is true in the following text, "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" (Luke 19:40). It is as if Christ said, "They [the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon] are not as hardened as you are." This merely conveys that God in His omniscience acknowledged the possibility of their conversion.

Since God's omniscience extends to past, present, and future, and all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, how the ungodly ought to tremble! For,

(1) God perceives and knows your heart and its spiritual frame. He knows what is concealed in it as well as what can issue forth from it. He knows your thoughts, vain imaginations, and contemplation upon both habitual and spontaneous sins. He is cognizant of the motives of all your actions—whether it is your objective to end in yourself, to get your own way, or to harm your neighbor. He is aware of the hatred and contempt you foster for your neighbor, your wrathful emotions, as well as your envy regarding your neighbor's prosperity. In sum, God truly perceives all that transpires in your heart even though you may neither discern it nor be conscious of it.

(2) God is cognizant of your immoral inclinations, adulterous eyes, licentious words, secret promiscuity, fornication, immoral conduct, as well as all the persons with whom you have engaged in such activity.

(3) God is cognizant of your inequitable behavior, deceptive business practices, trickery whereby you seek to make the belongings of your neighbor your own, dishonest billing practices, idleness, as well as all your other acts of thievery.

(4) God is cognizant of your gossiping, slandering of your neighbor, defamation of his character, and the delight you have in hearing and speaking about these things.

(5) He is cognizant of your pride, ostentatious behavior, promenading in front of the mirror, and how self-satisfied you are.

(6) The Lord is cognizant of your dancing and revelling, your gambling and card-playing.

(7) He is cognizant of your hypocrisy within as well as outside of the realm of religion. Be aware that, (1) God records all the aforementioned much more accurately than if someone were to be continually in your presence recording with pen and ink all your thoughts, words, and deeds, along with the location, day, month, and hour when they occurred. As there is a book of remembrance before God's countenance on behalf of His elect (Mal 3:16), there is likewise a book before the Lord's countenance in which the guilt of the ungodly is recorded. How conscious you ought to be of this!

(2) Be aware that the books will once be opened and you will be judged according to all that is recorded in them (Rev 20:12). Be assured that the Lord will set all things in order before your eyes (Ps 50:21).

(3) Consider it as an utmost certainty that God, the righteous Judge of heaven and earth who by no means will clear the guilty and whose judgment is according to truth, will punish you for all your sins (Ps 7:12-13; Ps 50:21). Not only will He pronounce the curse upon you with which He threatens transgressors of the law and say to you in the last day, "Depart from Me, ye cursed" (Matt 25:41), but He will also assign you eternally to the lake of fire which burns with sulfur and brimstone if you do not make haste to repent. You are presently not concerned whether God sees you, as long as people do not see you, but how frightful it will be for you when the Lord Jesus shall appear as Judge and will summon you before His judgment seat, examining and reexamining you with His eyes which will be as flames of fire! How dreadful will that day be! "But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?" (Mal 3:2); "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal 4:1).

Therefore, repent before it is too late. May you presently fear the all-seeing eye of God, so that in that day you will not be terrified before His flaming eyes.

You, however, who take your refuge in the Lord Jesus, choose Him as your Surety, receive Him by faith, find all your hope and comfort in Him, and fear and serve the Lord—how the omniscience of God ought to be to your comfort! For,

(1) He is cognizant of your sincerity relative to Him and your desire to please Him. "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him" (2 Chron 16:9); "such as are upright in their way are His delight" (Prov 11:20); "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright" (Ps 37:18).

(2) The Lord knows of your religious exercises in secret, prayers, supplications, wrestlings of faith, sighs, weeping, cleaving to Him, reading, meditation, holy intentions, fear of God, and godly walk. He saw the eunuch reading (Acts 8:28-29), and Paul praying (Acts 9:11). "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry" (Ps 34:15); "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him" (Ps 145:18).

(3) The Lord knows of your secret strife; of your wrestling against unbelief; of your sorrow over your sins, lack of light, and being afar from God; and of all your spiritual anxieties. "Lord, all my desire is before Thee; and my groaning is not hid from Thee" (Ps 38:9); "I dwell ... with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isa 57:15); "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Ps 34:18).

(4) The Lord perceives your bodily needs, adversities, poverty, and tribulations. He saw the need of the widow of Zarephath, and

provided for her (1 Kings 17), as well as of another widow (2 Kings 4). He saw Hagar in her misery (Gen 16:13) and the tribulation of Israel in

Egypt. "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows" (Exod 3:7); "Thou tellest my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy book?" (Ps 56:8).

(5) The Lord is cognizant of your innocence when people with lies speak evil of you and slander you. May it be to your comfort that, "if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:21); "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience" (2 Cor 1:12). Oh, what strong consolation may believers derive from the omniscience of God, for He does not merely take note of their misery in an external sense, but He beholds them with compassion and is ready to help them in the time of His good pleasure!

If the Lord is omniscient and takes such careful notice of every matter and deed, then this ought to stir us up to engage ourselves as follows:

First, as Ezra, be ashamed, considering that the Lord has perceived all your sinful spiritual frames and has observed all your sinful deeds. "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee" (Ezra 9:6). Be as the publican who stood afar off, smiting upon his breast, and "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven" (Luke 18:13).

Secondly, beware of all arrogance and pride in your heart as you walk before God and man. Thus, seek to walk in all meekness and humility, for the Lord knows how despicable and abominable you are and how you have nothing of which you should be proud. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5).

Thirdly, commit all that you desire or fear into the hands of the Lord. "Thou hast seen it: for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand" (Ps 10:14).

Fourthly, repeatedly confess your sins openly and conceal none of them as Adam did, for the Lord is nevertheless cognizant of them. "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps 90:8).

Fifthly, fear the Lord and be disturbed when the least sin begins to make its presence felt, for the Lord sees you. How greatly it aggravates your sin if you have committed it in the presence of God! Who would dare to commit adultery in the presence of men? Should anyone then dare to sin before the very eyes of God? Such ought to be considered the height of wickedness. "And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good" (Ezek 16:50); "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me" (Jer 2:22).

Sixthly, let the impression that God sees you continually accompany you in your walk, and by it be motivated to live in righteousness and humility before His countenance. Such is God's requirement. "... walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen 17:1); "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov 3:6); "I have set the Lord always before me" (Ps 16:8).

# The Will of God

The will of God also belongs to the communicable attributes of God. The ability to elect or reject, love or hate, and be pleased or displeased is referred to as the will. This being one of the special perfections to be found in man as a rational creature, it is therefore infinitely true for God. The will of God is the willing God Himself. There is but one will of God; however, there is a distinction in the objects to which His will relates. Therefore in recognizing this distinction we differentiate between *the will of His decree* and *the will of His command*.

We understand *the will of His decree*, also referred to as *the will of His good pleasure* or *His secret will*, to be God's purpose and good

pleasure which He will execute, either by Himself or by the agency of others. "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan 4:35); "Having predestinated us ... according to the good pleasure of His will ... who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph 1:5,11); "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight" (Matt 11:26). This good pleasure God executes irresistibly, and thus He always accomplishes His will. "... our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps 115:3); "who hath resisted His will?" (Rom 9:19). This refers to the ultimate outcome of all things which will be according to God's decree which He either has not revealed at all to man or which He reveals only after a period of time. This will can frequently be perceived only in retrospect, or in special situations by way of prophecy when specific elements of this will are revealed in His Word. Such is true for instance in reference to prophecies as well as the distinctive marks whereby one may conclude his salvation, being assured of this by the veracity of the promises.

The will of God's command is also referred to as His *preceptive will* or His *revealed will*. This will has reference to the regulative principle of life as well as to the laws which God has made known and prescribed to man in order that his walk might be regulated accordingly. Inasmuch as God has decreed that it is His good pleasure to convey His will to man, this

will could also be referred to as the will of His decree and good pleasure. As it is primarily descriptive of man's duty, however, it is associated with the will of God's command or His revealed will. Since God is holy, He has pleasure in, delights in, and approves of compliance with His precepts. He is displeased with and abhors deviation from His commandments. God commands obedience but also permits the violation of His commandments to demonstrate His justice in punishment and His mercy in being gracious. It is God's will to give to His elect His Holy Spirit who removes their heart of stone and causes them to walk and behave according to the commandments of the Lord. Herein God always infallibly and irresistibly accomplishes His purpose. Man, on the contrary, does not always conduct himself in a manner pleasing to God. The duty imposed by God is frequently not observed by man. God's purpose and good pleasure, however, will prosper since He commands that which is pleasing to Him and also because the decree of His good pleasure is accomplished. Thus the secret and the revealed will of God function side by side. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). Paul also refers to the will of His command. "... doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:6); "... that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2). This is also stated in Ps 143:10, where it reads, "Teach me to do Thy will."

In making a distinction in the will of God, we are not suggesting that God has two wills. In God the act of the will is singular. The difference rather relates to the objects towards whom His will is exercised. Much less do we suggest that God has two wills which are incompatible, as if God with His revealed will would desire something and His secret will would be opposed. When we consider the will of God as being either secret or revealed, this distinction pertains to decidedly different matters, some of which are revealed whereas others are not. The secret and revealed will of God neither relate to one and the same matter, nor should they be viewed from the same perspective. Let me illustrate. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice and kill His son Isaac; nevertheless, it was not God's will that Isaac would die. This became evident from the outcome. There is a distinction here between the command and the result. God's command



was His revealed or preceptive will, which was the basis for Abraham's behavior. He had to do everything which would contribute to the death of his son, which he also did. The result—that the death of Isaac would not take place by Abraham's activity—was another matter and belonged to the secret will of God's decree which Abraham perceived afterward when the voice of God prevented him. There should therefore be no concern as to what will should govern our behavior, as the Lord's secret will is solely His domain and against it we cannot sin. God will accomplish His good pleasure. Nevertheless, it is expressed in God's revealed will that we are to exercise confidence and subjection towards His secret will. It is His revealed will, however, which must be regulative for our behavior and it is in regard to the latter that we are guilty of sin.

We can define the exercising of the will of God as being either a necessary consequence or as being volitional in nature. This necessity, however, does not imply compulsion, for God freely loves Himself, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8), and "the Father loveth the Son" (John 5:20). By virtue of His immutability God necessarily wills that all which He has decreed shall come to pass. "My counsel shall stand" (Isa 46:10).

A volitional act is either an act of arbitrary determination or of one's own pleasure whereby one can opt for the one thing as well as its opposite, that is, to do or not do a certain thing. All that God wills He wills by virtue of His own pleasure, also that which He necessarily wills. In God there is a freedom to exercise His pleasure relative to many matters. He had the freedom of will either to create or not create, or to elect or not elect men. If God has decreed something, however, He wills it of necessity because He has decreed it. That which was a matter of sovereign prerogative before, God now wills of necessity, albeit voluntarily and as a matter of course.

The will of God issues forth from the very Being of God and is not caused by anything issuing forth from creatures. No creature can move God to will. All man's goodness cannot move God to will to do him good, for man's goodness rather has its origin in the will of God. If it is God's will to sanctify a person, he will become holy in consequence of this. God does not choose anyone unto salvation *because of* his good works, rather He chooses them *unto* good works.

Arminians and others who propose good works to be the moving cause of man's salvation, election, and reprobation, make the following distinctions relative to the will of God. They speak of an antecedent will and a will of consequence, of an efficacious and impotent will, and of an absolute and conditional will. To them the antecedent will is God's counsel concerning men whereby He, considering man as prior to and apart from his works, has chosen all men unto salvation. In God's will of consequence He takes man's works into consideration, thus choosing believers and those who persevere in good works unto salvation. The aforementioned parties perceive God's impotent will to be similar to His antecedent will. They understand this to relate to God's desire and inclination which neither find expression nor are executed, but are opposed by man and thus rendered impotent. They relate God's efficacious will to His consequent will, this efficacy issuing forth from his faith and good works whereby God is enabled to make him a partaker of salvation. God's absolute will, in their view, is not contingent upon any condition; instead, it considers man as prior to and apart from his works, which, however, is rendered impotent and futile by man. The conditional will of God relates to such blessings which He promises upon condition of faith and obedience, it being dependent upon the exercise of man's free will whether or not he meets these conditions, and thus whether or not he becomes a partaker of that which is promised.

For example, God decrees to save all men irrespective of their works; however, anticipating and presupposing their works, subsequently decrees not to save all men, but only those who believe. By virtue of His antecedent decree God willed to establish Saul in his kingdom; however, by virtue of His consequent decree He determined, in view of Saul's ungodly behavior, not to establish him but to reject him. God willed to save Judas if he believed; however, because of his unbelief He willed to damn him.

These distinctions are human inventions which are contrary to God's Word and replete with contradictions, as all this ascribes foolishness, impotence, and mutability to God. The suggestion that God truly, earnestly, and sincerely decrees to save all men, but subsequently changes His intent, is to maintain that this is the result of God not

perceiving previously what He perceives subsequently. If prior cognizance would cause Him to change His decree, His decree could not have been true, earnest, and sincere. Or it suggests that His change of intent is due to His inability to execute His will either because man prevents Him from doing so, or because God's nature is mutable, thus causing Him to change His mind. Neither of the aforesaid can be true concerning God. He is the only wise God (1 Tim 1:17) and the omnipotent One. "The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. ... For the Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa 14:24,27). He is also the immutable One in whom there is no change nor shadow of turning (James 1:17). He says concerning Himself, "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal 3:6); "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa 46:10). God is truth, and all that He wills He wills truly, earnestly, and sincerely. He is perfect. Far be it from the Lord to will something and yet be insincere; to will something and then to change it; to decree something and subsequently to be in error in this area, being neither desirous nor able to execute the said decree; and to be desirous while simultaneously not being desirous.

When the Lord states, "... for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever" (1 Sam 13:13), He would have us understand that many of His promises are given conditionally. If a person does not meet these conditions which God certainly knows

beforehand, God will consequently not grant that which He has promised. He also has prior knowledge when and to whom He will manifest His grace and enable to meet the conditions. Since Saul was disobedient towards God, it pleased God not to establish Saul in his kingdom. This was something the Lord would have done had he lived a godly life. Thus, there is no reference here to two wills in God, being an antecedent and a consequent will (for God had decreed to reject Saul and to establish David in his place), but rather to the will of God rejecting him due to his sin.

When the Lord Jesus says, "... how often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not!" (Matt 23:37), it is neither

suggested that there are two wills in God nor that He has an impotent will. Rather, Christ is here referring to His work which He executed according to His will, and to the opposition of the chief rulers of Jerusalem who were not desirous to enter in, and prevented the people from entering in as well.

When God is said to desire something which does not occur, such as when He states, "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, ... that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut 5:29), or, "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river" (Isa 48:18), He is speaking in the manner of men. Strictly speaking, such can never be said concerning the omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, and most perfect God. Rather, it indicates God's displeasure toward sin and how He delights in holiness. It indicates that sin is the reason why those blessings are withheld from them—blessings which they, according to His promise, would have received as a reward upon godliness. The promises are made upon condition of obedience which is granted to the elect according to God's immutable purpose. When God says, "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that He should return from His ways, and live?" (Ezek 18:23), this does not suggest that God's will is impotent. Rather, it indicates that God has no pleasure in the destruction of men, inasmuch as they are His creatures. He has pleasure in the exercise of righteousness and godliness, and in blessing the godly.

# Our Conduct and God's Will

Thus we have considered what the will of God is. Now we will demonstrate how a person ought to behave himself relative to God's will as well as how he ought to make use of it. God's will is the foundation for quietness and peace within the heart in all circumstances. It is the foundation and substance of, and the most powerful motive for, a believer in the practice of true holiness. I am referring to a believer who receives Christ unto reconciliation and by grace commits Himself to the service of the Lord. An unconverted person neither loves the Lord nor delights in His will. Rather, he wishes to be independent and desires that God, and whatever else may be of use, might be subservient to the fulfilling of his own will. Believers, on the contrary, know God and delight in Him and therefore also love the will of God. Since they have but a small beginning of all this, however, they have need to be further instructed. Therefore in your meditations frequently pause to reflect upon, acknowledge, and delight in the will of God, extracting peace and godliness from it.

Let us first consider the will of God's decree. As God is sovereign Lord over all His creatures, His will is therefore also sovereign over all that happens to His creatures and extends to what they do and refrain from doing. Acknowledge then with your whole heart the supreme authority and absolute freedom of God's will. Approve of His will with delight and joy by saying: "Amen, yes Lord," Thy will is sovereign, being the primary, supreme, and only reason why everything must occur. It is Thy prerogative to deal with all Thy creatures, with all men, and with me and my household, according to Thy will. I rejoice in the fact that it is Thy prerogative to do with the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth according to Thy will, and that there is no one who can stay Thy hand or say, "What doest Thou?" It is Thy free will to make a vessel unto honor or unto dishonor from the same lump of humanity, and to show Thy wrath and power on the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction, as well as the riches of Thy glory on the vessels of mercy which afore have been prepared unto glory (Rom 9:21-23). Thy will is sovereign to give kingdoms to whomsoever Thou wilt (Dan 4:17), and to turn the hearts of

kings whithersoever Thou wilt (Prov 21:1). Thou art free and hast absolute power and jurisdiction, on the basis of Thy will, to exalt the one and abase the other, to fill one with joy by giving him the desire of his heart, while overwhelming others with various vicissitudes and sorrows and withholding the desire of

their hearts from them. I rejoice in the fact that Thou art not accountable to anyone for the diversity of Thy actions. I rejoice in the fact that Thy will extends to other creatures, and even to me, and that therefore a creature, including myself in all that I encounter, may not end in anything else but Thy will only, finding delight in it. Should Thy will even be contrary to my natural desires, grant that in such circumstances I may persevere by focusing upon Thy will, recognizing it as Thine. May it be my confession, "Not my, but Thy will be done;" I desire to subject myself, just as I am, to Thy hand, bowing under Thy sovereign will. May Thy will be fully accomplished in me, whether it be according to my wishes or not. In all the turmoil of the world, in stormy winds, in the destruction and sinking of ships, in floods of water upon earth, in the burning of cities, in regional upheavals due to earthquakes, in destructive warfare, in victories and defeats, in the oppression and persecution of Thy church, in the poverty and tribulations of Thy children—yes, in all of this I perceive the accomplishment of Thy will, and therefore I worship, bowing before Thee, and silently confessing, "Amen, so be it, for this is the Lord's will."

"With respect to the future," everything will also transpire according to Thy will. All the tumultuous activity of man, all their schemes and intents, will not transpire except it be according to Thy will, as Thou dost govern everything. This I acknowledge, this I desire, and in this I acquiesce. This I desire to do in reference to all things, particularly in reference to myself—not because I feel that Thy will can be opposed, neither because I believe that all occurs due to an unavoidable fate, nor because I believe all things must work for good both for the church as well as for myself, but rather because it is Thy sovereign will. This suffices for me and therefore my confession is, "Amen, Thy will be fully done!" In regard to the future I shall be without concern; in prosperity and adversity I shall rejoice and be glad.

"If it pleases the Lord to avail Himself of means in the accomplishment of

His will to enable me to discern His will that much more clearly in the final outcome, I shall evaluate and also use such means, since it is God's will that I use them, recognizing them to be merely means rather than the cause of things. I shall not depend upon them in such a way as if the final outcome were dependent upon them. Rather, I shall focus upon His will, and in retrospect, when the matter has come to a conclusion, and via the means which have served the accomplishment of Thy purpose, I shall ascend to Thy will by acknowledging that Thou hast accomplished the matter, and thus be satisfied."

"If it would please the Lord in His goodness to use me in the accomplishment of His good pleasure, then I offer myself willingly: "Here am I; send me" (Isa 6:8). Use me. For that purpose I am willing to sacrifice myself, my family, and all that belongs to me, as long as Thy will may be fully done by me and through me."

In addition to the acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God's will, the believer has the insight that all which God wishes to accomplish will be to the magnification of His power, justice, and goodness. It will be perceived by angels and men who will rejoice in the revelation of God's perfections and give Him honor and glory, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev 4:11). Such is the desire and delight of a believer which causes him to say all the more, "Thy will be done!"

Furthermore, the believer has the promise that all God intends to do and will do, however contradictory His ways may seem, will be for the best advantage of His church, of the elect, and of himself in particular. In spite of all that transpires he beholds the promise, believes it, embraces it, is satisfied with it, and entrusts its accomplishment to the goodness and wisdom of the Lord, saying, "Thy will be done!"

In reference to the will of God's command, the believer acknowledges that all that God wills pertaining to his walk proceeds from the sovereign will of God, a will which has the holiness of God as its foundation. For God cannot command something which would be contrary to His holy character, but rather He commands man in a manner consistent with His

holiness. God did not create man in the image of His will, but in the image of His holy character, and has given unto man a law which is consistent with this holy character. As far as we are concerned, however, the law of God is the rule of holiness. We need not ascertain whether something is consistent with the holy character of God in order to establish a basis for obedience. Rather, we ought to ascertain what God has been pleased to command us, and thus we must "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom 12:2). We are obligated to do everything according to the will of God. "Doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph 6:6).

Having seen, upon considering His will, how His commandment is congruent with His holy character, this foundation for obedience also inherently obligates us towards God, in whose image we were created and are recreated, to follow Him and to manifest the presence of His image in us. Although our intellect is too limited to comprehend how every commandment is congruent with God's holy and righteous character as expressed in each commandment, the will of God is our regulative principle. If we are cognizant of this, we have a sufficient rule to live by. Even if the commandments of God did not issue forth from His holiness and justice, but merely from His majesty and sovereign prerogative to command—as was true for many special and ceremonial commands which proceeded only from the will and good pleasure of God—all creatures would still be obligated by the will of God. One need not search out whether all that God commands is just, for the will of God validates everything as just and good. God says, "I will," to which the believer responds, "Amen."

(1) Believers so love the will of God's command and consider it so sovereign that they esteem all His precepts to be right (Ps 119:128). They join Paul in saying, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom 7:12). The law of the Lord, being His will, is their joy, their delight, and the object of their love. "O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Ps 119:97).

(2) A believer, loving that law, does not merely acquiesce in the will of God's command, but the soul offers himself to the Lord to do His will, willingly submitting himself to the Lord's will. God's will is his will and



his will is swallowed up in God's will.

(3) The soul is ready and prepared to walk in the pathway of the Lord's commandments. He delights in the law of God according to the inner man, confessing with his whole heart, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart" (Ps 40:8).

(4) In his entire walk he focuses upon the will of God in order to regulate everything according to this will.

(5) The will of God is not merely a regulative principle. It is simultaneously an urgent motive, prompting the soul to be diligent, sincere, and persevering in doing God's pleasure.

(6) Even though there is great reward in the keeping of God's commandments and one may and must be quickened by it to a godly walk, the will of God is nevertheless the loftiest, most influential, and endearing object of affection. Blessed is he who relates to the will of God in such a manner, submitting himself to it in his walk both in prosperity and adversity.

Several attributes of God are considered in relationship to the will of God, such as holiness, goodness, grace, love, mercy, long-suffering, and justice.

# The Holiness of God

Holiness is the pure essence of the character of God. Consequently, it relates to the brightness of all His perfections, for which reason He is called a "light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). The Lord continually reveals Himself as holy, in order that the heart of man may continually be filled with deep awe and reverence. "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord ... glorious in holiness, fearful in praises?" (Exod 15:11). "Let them praise Thy great and terrible Name; for it is holy. Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at His footstool; for He is holy. Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy" (Ps 99:3,5,9); "Holy is His Name" (Luke 1:49).

The Lord is not merely called holy but is holiness itself. "Give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness" (Ps 97:12); "Once have I sworn by my holiness" (Ps 89:35); "Glory ye in His holy Name" (Ps 105:3).

From the holy character of God proceeds the holiness of all His deeds. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut 32:4).

From His holy character proceeds His hatred and contempt for sin. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab 1:13); "For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Ps 5:4-5).

From His holy character proceeds His delight in holiness. "For in these things I delight, saith the Lord" (Jer 9:24); "But such as are upright in their way are His delight" (Prov 11:20).

# The Goodness of God

Goodness is the very opposite of harshness, cruelty, gruffness, severity, mercilessness—all of which are far removed from God. How unbecoming it is to have such thoughts about God! Such sinful emotions are found in man. The goodness of God, on the contrary, is the loveliness, benign character, sweetness, friendliness, kindness, and generosity of God. Goodness is the very essence of God's Being, even if there were no creature to whom this could be manifested. "The good Lord pardon every one" (2 Chron 30:18); "Good and upright is the Lord: therefore will He teach sinners in the way" (Ps 25:8); "There is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt 19:17).

From this goodness issues forth lovingkindness and an inclination to bless His creatures. This is to the astonishment of all who take note of this, which explains why David exclaims twenty-six times in Ps 136, "For His mercy endureth for ever." In the following texts we read likewise. "Also unto Thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy" (Ps 62:12); "All the paths of the Lord are mercy" (Ps 25:10). From goodness and benevolence issues forth the doing of that which is good. "Thou art good, and doest good" (Ps 119:68); "Rejoice the soul of Thy servant: and attend unto the voice of my supplications. For Thou Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee" (Ps 86:4,6,5).

This goodness is of a *general* nature in reference to all God's creatures, since they are His creatures. "The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps 145:9); "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord" (Ps 33:5); "For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt 5:45). The goodness which is of a *special* or particular nature as it relates to God's children is thus expressed: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart" (Ps 73:1); "The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him, to the soul that seeketh Him" (Lam 3:25).

This goodness of God is the reason why a believer, even after many backslidings, is motivated by renewal to return unto the Lord. "The

children of Israel shall return ... and shall fear the Lord and His goodness" (Hos 3:5); "But I have trusted in Thy mercy" (Ps 13:5). This is why they call the Lord "the God of my mercy" (Ps 59:10,17). In this goodness they rejoice and this goodness they magnify. "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever" (Ps 89:1); "Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever" (Ps 106:1).

# The Love of God

Love is an essential attribute of God by which the Lord delights Himself in that which is good, it being wellpleasing to Him, and uniting Himself to it consistent with the nature of the object of His love. The love of God by definition is the loving God Himself, for which reason John states that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). When we view the love of God relative to its objects, however, several distinctions need to be made. We call this love *natural* when it refers to the manner in which God delights in Himself as the supreme manifestation of goodness. "For the Father loveth the Son" (John 5:20). We call this love *volitional* when it refers to the manner in which God delights in His creatures. And thus this love is either the love of benevolence or the love of His delight.

*The love of His benevolence* is either *general* as it relates to the manner in which God delights in, desires to bless, maintains, and governs all His creatures by virtue of the fact that they are His creatures (Ps 145:9), or it is *special*. This special love refers to God's eternal designation of the elect to be the objects of His special love and benevolence. This finds expression in the following texts, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John

3:16); "As Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it" (Eph 5:25).

*The love of God's delight* has the elect as its object as they are viewed in Christ, being clothed with His satisfaction and holiness perfect and complete in Him (Col 2:10); "According as he hath chosen us in Him ... according to the good pleasure of His will ... wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph 1:4-6). This also applies to the believer in his present state, having the principle of holiness within him. "For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God" (John 16:27).

This love of benevolence precedes all good works of man, whereas the

love of God's delight concerns itself with men who presently either are partakers of or perform that which is good.

# The Grace of God

Grace can be defined as being a perfection of God's character which has no relationship to an object—that is, who God was and would be even if there were no creature; namely, a compassionate God who would be capable of manifesting His benevolence to creatures apart from any merit. Grace can also be considered relative to creatures in the manifestation of undeserved benevolence. Concerning the grace of God we distinguish between *grace as a gracious gift*, or *grace as a gracious receipt*.

*Gratia gratis dans* (grace as a gracious gift) relates to God's perfection as being the fountain from which all His benefits issue forth. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil 1:29)! "There is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works" (Rom 11:5-6); "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24).

*Gratia gratis data* (grace as a gracious receipt), relates to the received benefits themselves. This is true for common grace of which unconverted persons are the recipients to which Jude referred, "Ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). This is also true for saving grace which is frequently referred to as the *gifts of grace* (cf. Rom 5:15-16; Rom 6:23; Rom 11:29). The following texts speak of this: "Through the grace given unto me" (Rom 12:3); "That ye might have a second benefit" (2 Cor 1:15); "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (1 Pet 2:19). Both perspectives of grace, that is, grace as a gracious gift and grace as a gracious receipt, are often conjoined in the Pauline benedictions. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father" (Rom 1:7); "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you" (1 Cor 16:23).

# The Mercy of God

In man mercy is related to grief, sorrow, and pity. Such, however, is not the case with respect to God. Mercy, being the merciful God Himself, is an essential attribute whereby God is inclined to come to the aid of a creature in his misery. Even though a miserable one is the object of the manifestation of divine mercy, misery is nevertheless not the motivating cause of God's mercy, but it issues forth from the goodness of God, which in its manifestation towards a miserable one is denominated as mercy. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He called Himself merciful (Exod 34:6). The Lord Jesus refers to this mercy as an example worthy of imitation. "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

Divine mercy is either general or special in nature. The *general* manifestation of mercy extends to all the works of God, unconverted persons inclusive. "His tender mercies are over all His works" (Ps 145:9). The Lord Jesus showed compassion towards all sorts of miserable persons (Matt 14:14; Mark 6:34). The *special* manifestation of mercy extends to the elect who therefore are called *vessels of mercy* (Rom 9:23). Since the manifestation of this mercy is purely volitional in nature—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (Rom 9:15)—it is also inexpressibly great. This is not only because it extends from generation to generation (Luke 1:78), but also because of its intensity and magnitude. It therefore is emphatically referred to as great mercy: "According to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope" (1 Pet 1:3). It is further stated that God is rich in mercy, "But God, who is rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4). God is spoken of as a

God of multiple mercies. "The Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1:3). God's mercy is referred to as being tender. "Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1:78).



# The Long-suffering of God

This is an essential attribute of God whereby He refrains Himself from initially pouring out His full wrath upon the sinner, thus postponing his punishment—meanwhile bestowing benefits upon him. It is God's character to be long-suffering (Exod 34:6). The Lord is long-suffering towards sinners in a general sense. "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Rom 2:4). "What if God ... endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" (Rom 9:22).

God is longsuffering towards the elect prior to their conversion. "The Lord ... is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9); "To declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom 3:25).

God is longsuffering towards His children, as considered in their regenerate state, by not always chastising them for their sins (it being understood that the elect are not punished in the definitive sense of the word), but rather overlooking their failures and having much patience with them. "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal 3:17); "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Ps 103:13).

Such is the character of God, as we have extensively demonstrated to you. His character is holy, good, loving, gracious, merciful, and long-suffering.

You who are convinced of your miserable condition and are desirous to be reconciled with God, be not discouraged from coming to God. You need not be discouraged if your desire is to approach unto Him in truth, with sincerity, and in the right way, that is, only through Christ. Simply come: the Lord is not merciless, cruel, or pitiless. On the contrary, He is as He declares Himself to be in His Name: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod

34:6)! Just as the father of the prodigal son, the Lord runs to meet all who turn to Him from afar. He calls you, manifests Himself to you, and promises not to cast anyone out that comes to Him. Do not let fear restrain you from doing so, but come boldly to the Lord and His goodness.

And believers, how you do injustice towards the Lord when you view Him as cruel, merciless, pitiless, and always angry, because He neither immediately delivers you from your threatening and pressing circumstances, nor grants you your desires, nor answers your prayers. You dishonor God with such thoughts. You imagine things about God that are unbecoming of Him. Humble yourself for entertaining such sinful and God-dishonoring conceptions. Refrain yourself from and be fearful of such thoughts. How detrimental it is to you when you dwell upon such thoughts. It will prevent you from praying believingly. You will rob yourself of a quiet confidence in God, frustrate the expression of your love towards God, and bring upon yourself darkness, restlessness, the hiding of God's countenance, and a vulnerability towards sin.

Please conduct yourself no longer thus, but condition yourself to view God always in such a fashion as we have described Him to be on the basis of His Word. Acknowledge Him to be such and magnify Him in these perfections. If you have sinned or are in the way of affliction, believe firmly and seek to maintain a lively impression that God's character is truly of such a nature. Therefore frequently humble yourself before Him as a child and be at liberty to go to God believing Him to be such, not only as far as His character is concerned but also that He is such a God in regard to you. Rejoice in this and without fear commit both yourself and your case to Him. You will experience that it will be to your comfort and joy as well as promote intimate communion with Him, strengthen your faith, and result in progress in the way of sanctification. Then the holiness of God will not discourage you but generate a childlike reverence in you; and it will become your delight to be holy, since He is holy.

# The Righteousness or Justice of God

The righteousness of God can be considered either in and of itself as referring to the justness, perfection, and holiness of the character of God; or in view of its manifestation toward the creature. As such the righteousness or justice of God consists in giving each his worthy due, either by punishment or reward.

Justice is executed either by way of mutual exchange or in a retributive fashion. Among men, the execution of *justice by way of mutual exchange* is practiced, as for instance when monetary remuneration is made according to an agreement. Such, however, is not true with regard to God, since none of our works, however perfect they may be, are by nature meritorious before God. Since none of our works are perfect, there can be no proportionate relationship between work and remuneration. God, always being independent, is not indebted to anyone. Man cannot take that which is his and bring it before God, for the good he performs originates in God. Since it is man's natural obligation to perform good works, he, having done so, can make no claims because of it. "so likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

*Retributive justice* must be ascribed to God, both in reference to reward as well as punishment. Whatever God does is just. "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He" (Deut 32:4). God is just when He acts according to either His promises or His threatenings. "That Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest" (Ps 51:4). God is just when He delivers and saves a person. "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:21-22). God is just in damning sinners. "... the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to His deeds" (Rom 2:5-6);

"Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments" (Ps 119:137). The meting out of punishment is generally referred to as *the avenging justice of God*.

*Question:* In reference to the avenging justice of God, does God punish sin because it pleases Him, since He could refrain from doing so if He so desired, or is the punishment of sin a necessary consequence of the righteous character of God, so that He cannot but punish sin, that is, He cannot let sin remain unpunished?

*Answer:* The question is not whether God has the right and the authority to mete out punishment. Man is naturally cognizant of the fact that sin deserves punishment. The heathen know "that they which commit such things are worthy of death" (Rom 1:32). Neither is it a question of whether God punishes sin by constraint or whether the avenging justice of God is so natural to Him that, just as fire always burns, there is an immediate response in meting out punishment upon the commission of each sin. God, doing everything independently, also does that which is natural to Him to the superlative degree. The freeness with which God exercises His will should not be construed to mean that it is a matter of indifference to Him whether or not He punishes sin. Rather, it should be viewed as a necessary consequence. Thus, God by virtue of His perfect, holy, and righteous character is inclined as the only wise God to punish sin at a time and in a manner suitable to Him. However, the question at hand is: "Is righteousness or punishment as an exercise of justice such that punishment cannot be avoided, and whether as God He cannot acquit without punishing sin, since such an act would be unjust and contrary to His holy and just character?" Our answer is "yes," which is confirmed by Scripture. "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25). God is a righteous Judge (Ps 7:9); "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Ps 5:5-6); "The Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked" (Nah 1:23). We will deal comprehensively with this subject in Chapter 17 which deals with the necessity of satisfaction.

Beware, oh sinner, whoever you are, for God is just! Do not imagine that

you will be able to satisfy God by praying, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner," or by doing your utmost to refrain from evil and to practice virtue. To imagine such is to be on the broad way to eternal

destruction, and causes millions, who live under the ministry of the gospel, to perish. If you could be delivered from this foolish imagination, there would still be hope for you. As long as you foster such an imagination, however, you are in a hopeless condition. Please consider that there can be no hope of grace and salvation without satisfaction of the justice of God, that is, by the enduring of punishment.

You have heard that God is gracious, which is true. You are guilty, however, of distorting the essential meaning of the grace of God by interpreting it to refer to remission of sin and absolution from punishment apart from satisfaction. Such, however, is not grace. There is no contradiction in God. The justice of God, which cannot be compromised to the least degree, of necessity demands the punishment of the sinner. God cannot deny Himself, and thus grace does not negate His justice. Grace is not incompatible with justice, but confirms it. This is the grace of God so highly exalted in His Word—that God, without finding anything in man, yes, contrary to his desert, gave His Son as a Surety. He transferred the sins of the elect from their account to His and by bearing the punishment justly due upon their sin, satisfied the justice of God on their behalf. This is grace, namely, that God offers Jesus as Surety in the gospel. It is grace when God grants faith to a sinner to receive Jesus and to entrust his soul to Jesus. It is grace when God converts a sinner, granting him spiritual life. It is grace when God permits a sinner to sensibly experience His favor. It is grace when God sanctifies a sinner, leading him in the way of holiness to salvation.

Please note how much the grace of God differs from your conception of grace. Put your erroneous conception aside and cease from trying to make all things well in the way of prayer and self-reformation. Perhaps you reply, "Then all my hope would be gone, and I would be given over to despair." My response is, "What can it profit you to flatter yourself a little with a false hope and thus perish forever?" Instead, give up all hope and despair of yourself; believe and acknowledge the righteousness of God who cannot forgive sin apart from satisfaction and the bearing of

punishment. Keep your sins and the justice of God clearly in view, as well as your inability to satisfy this justice. Freely fear and tremble, but do not remain in such a condition nor end in it. Allow the terror of the Lord to move you to faith. Seek salvation in a way whereby God's justice is satisfied. Therefore, flee to the Lord Jesus as Surety, receiving Him to your justification and sanctification. That is the only way by which you can be saved.

And believers, may you who know this way—the way by which you go to God—increasingly penetrate the truth of God's justice until you may perceive its purity, glory, and preciousness. Magnify God in His justice, and rejoice in the fact that God is just. Love His righteousness as you love His goodness and mercy, especially in that this righteousness has been satisfied on your behalf. Give thanks to God that the Lord leads you and all His elect along such a holy way unto salvation. Do not consider the justice of God to be against you, but as being for you—to give you salvation and justly punish your enemies.

# The Power of God

In the foregoing we divided the communicable attributes of God into three main categories: intellect, will, and power. Having considered the first two, we shall now consider the attribute of power. The word *power* is ambiguous in our language, as it also refers to dominion, supremacy, and authority. Whenever it is attributed to God it refers to His omnipotence.

Power in its primary meaning is referred to in Greek as *Exusia*, and in Latin as *potestas*. Its meaning is to have a just claim upon someone, authority, and supreme jurisdiction. One can consider the power of God as an essential attribute, or use it in reference to the dispensation of grace. God is Lord and Master over all His creatures and has unrestricted, absolute power and jurisdiction over them. This necessarily follows from the fact that He is God and that the creature is dependent upon Him for existence and activity. In the exercise of this power He is not accountable to anyone; no one may demand a reason from Him by asking, "What doest Thou? Is this just?" We may often not be able to comprehend why God acts in a particular way; it should be sufficient for us that God is sovereign. This truth we are obligated to embrace. Consider the following texts: "Who will say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Job 9:12). "For He giveth not account of any of His matters" (Job 33:13).

Nebuchadnezzar expresses this forcefully when he states, "He doeth 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 doest Thou?" (Dan 4:35). Also consider the following passages. "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with mine own?" (Matt 20:15); "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? 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?" (Rom 9:20-21).

The Father has delegated His economical or executive power to the Mediator, Jesus Christ. Besides having given Him the church and all the elect in order to bring them unto salvation, He has also subjected all

creatures unto Him so that He might use them to promote the salvation of the elect. This delegation of power, however, is not to the exclusion of the Father, so that the Father by virtue of this delegation would be deprived of power, for the Father executes all things by means of the Son. This power is referred to when it is stated, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth" (Matt 28:18).

The power of God in its second meaning, *dunamis* in Greek, and *potentia* in Latin, refers to the power and strength of God whereby He is able to execute and accomplish everything which is in agreement with His character and His truth—also to create whatever is conceivable and to do whatever He wishes to do. From stones He is able to raise up children unto Abraham (Matt 3:9), that is, to create human beings from a lump of clay as He did in the beginning, and make such human beings partakers of both the faith and life of Abraham. God could even create thousands of worlds. In a word, God's power is unlimited. One could imagine the creation of many things which would be contrary to the nature and truth of God. One could speculate about imaginary things which bear no resemblance to a creature. To relate this to the omnipotence of God and to ask whether God would be able to perform such things, is to entertain thoughts about God which are void of reverence and godly fear. Whatever is contradictory to the nature and truth of God, as well as contrary to the essential nature of a creature, is no reflection upon the power of God. Far be it from us to attribute this to the omnipotent and holy God. "Far be it from God, that He should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity" (Job 34:10).

God can neither deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13), nor can He lie or deceive (Titus 1:2). "It was impossible for God to lie" (Heb 6:18). Even though God has eternally been capable of creating a world, it does not follow that the world could have existed eternally. "Yes" and "no" are at all times opposites and cannot be simultaneous realities. One and the same body, one and the same man, cannot be simultaneously present at many places which are far removed from each other. These and a thousand-fold more things do not appertain to omnipotence. Nevertheless, we maintain that God by His omnipotence is able to accomplish whatever He will even beyond what He has willed, as well as whatever He would will. His arm is



not shortened and therefore He is called the Almighty. "I am the Almighty God" (Gen 17:1); "When the Almighty was yet with me" (Job 29:5); "... saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor 6:18).

The Lord has no need of any objects, means, or anything which creatures require in order to function. "God ... calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom 4:17); "For He spake and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps 33:9); "There is nothing too hard for Thee" (Jer 32:17); "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). Whatever God wills, He shall accomplish irresistibly. "Our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased" (Ps 115:3); "His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa 14:27).

Therefore, you who are ungodly should fear, for you have such an omnipotent God against you! You cannot prevail against Him. There is neither a hiding place or refuge, nor is there anyone who will be able to offer you protection against Him and deliver you out of His hand. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10:31). "Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty" (Isa 13:6).

And you, children of God, let the omnipotence of God encourage your hearts. If God is for you, who will be against you? Do you have any corporal needs and know not how to meet them? Even if there are no means available, God has the answer. He requires no means, and if the Lord desires to avail Himself of means, He will bring them about and make them available to you. Insignificant means are sufficient for Him

for He is the Almighty One. He creates light out of darkness in order that the movement of His hand may be observed that much more clearly. In all your perplexities confess with Abraham, "The Lord shall provide." Does your soul stand in need of light, comfort, a change of heart, and strength against sin? Even if you see no solution, He is able to give you the desire of your heart with one word. Seek to maintain a lively perception of the omnipotence of God. This will strengthen you in all things, causing you to take refuge with Him and be free from concern, fear, and terror. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps 91:1).

# **The Duty of the Christian to Reflect upon the Attributes of God**

Thus we have sought to present to you both the Being and the perfections of God. Such a God is our God. He is the object of our religion. Consequently, it is the duty of all who practice religion to reflect continually upon God as He is, to live in contemplation of Him, and to walk before His countenance, for it is this which the Lord requires from those that are His. "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect" (Gen 17:1); "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov 3:6); "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic 6:8). "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace" (Job 22:21).

Such has been the continual practice of the saints who are held before us in Scripture as examples to be emulated. Consider for example Enoch, Noah, Moses, David, and Asaph. "And Enoch walked with God" (Gen 5:24); "Noah walked with God" (Gen 6:9); "For he (Moses) endured, as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb 11:27); "I (David) have set the Lord always before me" (Ps 16:8); "When I awake I am still with Thee" (Ps 139:18); "Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; but it is good for me to draw near to God" (Ps 73:23,28).

The most significant promise God makes to His people is when He promises that they will walk with Him, and He will walk with them. "They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance" (Ps 89:15); "and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23); "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (2 Cor 6:16).

This walking with God occurs,

(1) when the heart with holy determination separates and withdraws itself from all that is visible and tangible. "While we look not at the things

which are seen" (2 Cor 4:18); "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor 6:17);

(2) in quietly turning toward God, while preparing oneself to be illuminated by His wondrous light. "In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up" (Ps 5:3); "Truly my soul waiteth upon God" (Ps 62:1);

(3) when we focus upon the attributes of God that we might gain an increasingly deeper understanding of them and perceive their influence in the heart. "Therefore I will look unto the Lord" (Mic 7:7); "They looked unto Him, and were lightened" (Ps 34:5). Moses endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27);

(4) when we engage in all humility in intimate communion with God. One time this will consist in silently presenting ourselves before God, while at another time there will be a reverent bowing before Him in worship. Then there will be times of holy dialogue, prayer, humble submission, trusting, rejoicing and delighting in the Lord, as well as a willing surrender to the service of the Lord in order to live in a manner pleasing to Him. This is that sublime life; this is what constitutes a walking with God. It is the hidden way in which nothing but holiness and delight are experienced.

In order to motivate you to become enamored with such a life, and to encourage you to stir yourself up to commence with such a walk and to persevere in it, you should be aware that walking with God engenders selfabasement and a spiritual frame which is pleasing to the Lord and desirable for yourself. It also engenders steadfast and abundant comfort, true joy and peace which pass all understanding, and

genuine sanctification.

For when the soul is privileged to reflect upon God as his God in Jesus Christ, such a soul will be conscious of the *righteousness* of God. He will magnify and delight in this righteousness no less than in God's goodness and love. He will perceive in this attribute only light, purity, and extraordinary glory. Such a soul rejoices the more in this righteousness, since by virtue of the merits of Christ it is no longer against him unto

destruction, but rather for his help and salvation, and to the damnation of the ungodly.

The soul beholding God's *goodness* and *all-sufficiency*, and tasting the power of these is so fully satisfied with this that all the goodness of the creature vanishes. It no longer has any appeal to him. He can do without it and confesses with Asaph, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee ... but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps 73:25-26).

The soul, irradiated by the *love* of God and ignited with reciprocal love, loses itself in this love and is silent in response to it. He stands in amazement of this love, and finds so much in it that all creature-love loses its appeal. He no longer perceives any desirability in the creature except where he perceives something of God in it. Therefore he no longer covets the love of others and is readily weaned from all that appears to be desirable upon earth.

Viewing the *holiness* of God, the soul, not able to endure its brilliant splendor, covers her countenance, exclaiming with the angels, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts!" He thus becomes enamored with this holiness and desires to be holy as He is holy who has called him.

The soul perceives the *sovereignty* of the holy *will* of God, exalting, esteeming, and approving it as such. He rejoices in the full accomplishment of this will relative to all creatures as well as himself. He submits himself to this will which sweetens and makes all things well. He yields his own will to be swallowed up in the will of God. The Lord's will is his will both in what he endures and does, and he is thus ready to perform all that is according to God's will and is pleasing to Him.

Contemplating the *magnificence* and *glory* of God, the dignity and glory of all creatures vanish and are in comparison considered to be lowly, insignificant, and contemptible. He neither desires the splendor and glory of the world for himself, nor is he intimidated by the dignity of others who might cause him to act contrary to the will of His God. In that aspect he deems the dignified and honorable equal to the most insignificant and contemptible even though he will fully subject himself

to all whom God has placed over him because God wills it. Rather, he bows in all humility before God the most High, rendering Him honor and glory. His heart and tongue are prepared and ready to speak of the honor and glory of His majesty.

Viewing the *omnipotence* of God in itself as well as in its manifestation in all creatures, the power of creatures which either is exercised for or against him vanishes. He will neither rely upon nor fear it, but dwelling in the secret place of the most High he abides under the shadow of the Almighty. In that shadow he rejoices over all his enemies, enjoys safety without fear, and is confident.

In contemplating the multifaceted and unsearchable *wisdom* of God as it is manifested in all His works both in the realm of nature and of grace, he loses his own wisdom, considering it to be but foolishness, as well as all esteem for the wisdom of friend and enemy. Such a soul is quiet and satisfied with the all-wise government of God, be it in relation to the whole world, the church, his country of residence, times of peace and war, or its effect upon him and his loved ones. He yields in everything to the wisdom of God who knows both time and manner, even though the soul has no prior realization or perception thereof.

The soul, viewing the infallible *truth* and *faithfulness* of God, refuses to rely upon human promises. They neither can cause him to rejoice nor can human threatenings terrify him, for he is aware of human mutability. However, He knows the Lord to be a God of truth who keepeth truth forever. He knows the promises and believes them, being so convinced of their certainty as if they were already fulfilled. He therefore rests in them and has a joyful hope in them.

Behold, is this not a joyful life—a heaven upon earth—to have such a God as your God who promotes both your welfare and your salvation? Can there be sorrow in such a soul? Does not He who has a God as the God of joy and gladness have every reason to experience immediate comfort? Does not such a walk with God cause the soul to manifest utmost meekness and humility, being cognizant of his own insignificance? This engenders in the soul a circumspect and unwavering spiritual frame, a quiet and humble submission in all things, and a fearless valor and

courage in the performance of his duties, even when the Lord calls to a duty which is extraordinary in nature. There is a delighting in that which he may have done for the Lord, submissively leaving the outcome to be determined by His government. Such a spiritual frame engenders genuine holiness. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18).

All virtue which does not issue forth from such a representation and contemplation of God in Christ is of little value for it lacks true essence. A view of God, as outlined above, elevates the soul above all creature activity and unites him with God and His will, which teaches him his duty as well as the manner in which he is to perform it. Such a view of God will bring forth the most effective and purest motives to stir up the soul. In this view of God the soul may find all sweetness and peace—indeed, it brings heaven in the soul and the soul in heaven. It prevents sinful lusts from issuing forth; and if they emerge, it enables the soul to subdue them. This is the fear of God, love to God, submission to God, and obedience to God, which causes the soul to radiate holiness as the countenance of Moses was radiant when for forty days he had communion with God upon the mountain. "Blessed is the man whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that He may dwell in Thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple" (Ps 65:4). Oh, blessed eternity when we shall always be with the Lord, shall see Him face to face, and know Him as we are known! (1 Cor 13:12).

# **Directions for Reflecting upon the Attributes of God**

In order to be properly engaged in this contemplation of God, and thereby to increase in the knowledge and love of God, the following directions are to be observed.

First, maintain a lively impression that you are but an insignificant creature, and seek to persevere in such a spiritual frame. Realize that your soul's ability for comprehension is very limited and that a matter may readily exceed your understanding. Furthermore, our understanding having been darkened through sin, we are very unfit to comprehend anything about God who is an infinite Spirit. Can a small bottle contain an entire ocean? How then can a finite being comprehend an infinite Being? Can someone look directly into the sun without being blinded? How then will anyone view God who is an infinite light dwelling in the light unto which no man can approach (1 Tim 6:16) and is clothed with the garment of light? Everyone therefore, when viewing himself from this perspective, must recognize himself to be but a great and foolish beast, not having a right human understanding because he has been so blinded by sin. Truly, to perceive that God is incomprehensible and to acquiesce in and lose one's self in this; to pause and reflect in holy amazement; to believe that the Lord infinitely transcends the capacity of our mind; to rejoice in the fact that God unveils to man that He exists and reveals something of Himself; and to be satisfied with that revelation—that constitutes knowledge of God and is the best frame to increase in this knowledge.

Secondly, be more passive in your contemplation of God and allow yourself to be more illuminated with divine light. Quietly follow that light with your thoughts and permit yourself to be influenced by it rather than wearying your soul with rational deductions, so the soul may move beyond the illumination granted at that moment. The reality and intensity of such mental activity will cause our thoughts to be more carnal than godly and will bring darkness upon the soul.

Thirdly, in doing so it is essential that the soul in all simplicity approves of God's revelation of Himself to her and refrains from hankering to comprehend this revelation. If one seeks to penetrate the manner of God's existence intellectually—that is, His eternity, infinity, omniscience, omnipotence, and internal motions—it will of necessity bring the soul in darkness and various temptations will emerge as a result, for the mind then contemplates things which are beyond its reach. Therefore, one should quickly resist any inclination to ponder about the "why" and the "how" of God's existence, nipping any temptations in the bud. Flee them by readily focusing upon your

insignificance and darkness of understanding, and in all humility start again from the beginning.

Fourthly, in order for the soul to contemplate upon God in a manner which is becoming of Him, he must seek to be in a godly frame of mind and be emptied of sinful desires and world conformity, for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him" (Ps 25:14). "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8); "he that loveth me shall be loved of My Father, and I will ... manifest Myself to Him. And we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:21,23).

Fifthly, in doing so historical faith must be very active. This means that as we come to the Word, we will read what God says about Himself, without contradiction accept it as the truth, and conclude and confess that God is such as He reveals Himself to be. Our thinking will remain within the context of God's Word without agonizingly seeking to move beyond the Word. We will then in all simplicity follow the Lord, until it pleases Him to lead us to a higher level of understanding.

Sixthly, it is essential that one considers God to be His God in Christ. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is to be found in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). Outside of Christ God is a terror, and can only be viewed as a consuming fire. In Christ, however, one may have liberty; and God reveals Himself to such who approach unto Him in that way. Then one will be able to better endure the light of God's countenance, rejoice in it, and therein glorify God. One ought to be cautious, however, of becoming too free and irreverent when considering God as Father in



Christ and in the contemplation upon His perfections which are unveiled by means of the covenant of grace. The proper frame for contemplation upon God is to be humble, reverent, and to tremble with awe before the majesty of the Lord.