

Lecture VII.

Of The Name Of God

Exod. iii. 13, 14.—“And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you 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 and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”

We are now about this question, What God is. But who can answer it? Or, if answered, who can understand it? It should astonish us in the very entry to think that we are about to speak and to hear of his majesty whom “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of any creature to consider what he is.” Think ye that blind men could have a pertinent discourse of light and colours? Would they form any suitable notion of that they had never seen, and which cannot be known but by seeing? [036] What an ignorant speech would a deaf man make of sound which a man cannot so much as know what it is but by hearing of it? How then can we speak of God who dwells in such inaccessible light that though we had our eyes opened, yet they are far less proportioned to that resplendent brightness, than a blind eye is to the sun's light?

It used to be a question. If there be God? Or, how it may be known that there is a God? It were almost blasphemy to move such a question, if there were not so much Atheism in the hearts of men, which makes us either to doubt, or not firmly to believe and seriously to consider it. But what may convince souls of the Divine Majesty? Truly, I think, if it be not evident by its own

brightness, all the reason that can be brought is but like a candle's light to see the sun by! Yet, because of our weakness the Lord shines upon us in the creatures, as in a glass and this is become the best way to take up the glorious brightness of his majesty by reflection in his word and works. God himself dwells in light inaccessible that no man can approach unto, if any look straight to that Sun of Righteousness, he shall be astonished and amazed and see no more than in the very darkness. But the best way to behold the sun is to look at it in a pail of water, and the surest way to know God by, is to take him up in a state of humiliation and condescension, as the sun in the rainbow. In his word and works, which are mirrors of the divine power and goodness and do reflect upon the hearts and eyes of all men the beams of that uncreated light. If this be not the "speech that" day uttereth unto day, and night unto night, "One self Being gave me a being," and if thou hear not that language that is "gone out into all the earth," and be not, as it were, noised and possessed with all the sounds of every thing about thee, above thee, beneath thee, yea, and within thee, all singing a melodious song to that excellent name which is above all names and conspiring to give testimony to the fountain of their being if this, I say, be not so sensible unto thee as if a tongue and a voice were given to every creature to express it, then, indeed, we need not reason the business with thee who hast lost thy senses. Do but, I say, retire inwardly, and ask in sobriety and sadness, what thy conscience thinks of it, and undoubtedly it shall confess a divine majesty, or at least tremble at the apprehension of what it either will not confess or slenderly believes. The very evidence of truth shall extort an acknowledgment from it. If any man denied the divine majesty, I would seek no other argument to persuade him than what was used to convince an old philosopher who denied the fire: they put his hand in it till he felt it. So I say, return within to thy own conscience and thou shalt find the scorching heat of that Divine Majesty burning it up, whom thou wouldst not confess. There

is an inward feeling and sense of God that is imprinted in every soul by nature that leaves no man without such a testimony of God, that makes him “without excuse there is no man so impious so atheistical, but whether he will or not, he shall feel at some times that which he loves not to know or consider of, so that what rest secure consciences have from the fear and terror of God, it is like the sleep of a drunken man, who, even when he sleeps, does not rest quietly.”

Now, although this inward stamp of a Deity be engraven on the minds of all, and every creature without have some marks of his glory stamped on them, so that all things a man can behold above him, or about him, or beneath him, the most mean and inconsiderable creatures, are pearls and transparent stones that cast abroad the rays of that glorious brightness which shines on them, as if a man were enclosed into a city built all of precious stones, that in the sunshine all and every parcel of it, the streets, the houses, the roofs, the windows all of it, reflected into his eyes those sunbeams in such a manner as it all had been one mirror—though, I say, this be so, yet such is the blockishness and stupidity of men that they do not, for all this, consider of the glorious Creator, so that all these lamps seem to be lighted in vain to show forth his glory, which, though they do every way display their beams upon us, that we can turn our eye nowhere but such a ray shall penetrate it, yet we either do not consider it, or the consideration of it takes not such deep root as to lead home to God. Therefore the Scripture calls all natural men atheists. They have “said in their heart, there is no God,” Psal. xiv. 1. All men almost confess a God with their mouth, and think they believe in him, but alas! behold their actions and hearts, what testimony they give for a man's walking and conversation is like an eye witness, that one of them deserves more credit than ten ear-witnesses of professions,—*Plus valet oculatus testis unus, quam auriti decem.* Now, I may ask of you, what would ye do, how would ye walk, if ye believed there were no God? Would ye

be more dissolute and profane, and more void of religion? Would not human laws bind you as much in that case as they now do? For that is almost all the restraint that is upon many,—the fear of temporal punishment, or shame among men. Set your walking beside a heathen's conversation, and save that you say, ye believe in the true God, and he denies him, there is no difference. Your transgressions speak louder than your professions, “that there is no fear of God before your eyes”, Psal. xxxvi. 1. Your practice belies your profession, you “profess that you know God, but in works you deny him,” saith Paul, Tit. i. 16 *Ore quod dicitis, opere negatis.*

In the words read in your audience, you have a strange question, and a strange answer: a question of Moses and an answer of God. The occasion of it was the Lord's giving to Moses a strange and uncouth message. He was giving him commission to go and speak to a king to dismiss and let go six hundred thousand of his subjects, and to speak to a numerous nation to depart from their own dwellings and come out whither the lord should lead them. Might not Moses then say within himself, “Who am I, to speak such a thing to a King? Who am I, to lead out such a mighty people? Who will believe that thou hast sent me? Will not all men call me a deceiver, an enthusiastical fellow, that take upon me such a thing?’ Well then, saith Moses to the Lord,—‘Lord, when I shall say, that the God of their fathers sent me unto them, they will not believe me, they have now forgotten thy majesty, and think that thou art but even like the vanities of the nations, they cannot know their own portion from other nations vain idols which they have given the same name unto, and call gods as well as thou art called. Now therefore,’ says he, ‘when they ask me what thy proper name is by which thou art distinguished from all idols, and all the works of thine own hands, and of men's hands, what shall I say unto them? Here is the question.’ But why askest thou my name? saith the Lord to Jacob,” Gen. xxxii. 29. Importing, that it is high presumption and bold curiosity

to search such wonder. Ask not my name, saith the angel to Manoah, for "it is secret or wonderful." Judges xiii. 18. It is a mystery, a hidden mystery, not for want of light, but for too much light. It is a secret, it is wonderful, out of the reach of all created capacity. Thou shalt call his name "Wonderful," Isa. ix. 6. What name can express that incomprehensible Majesty? The mind is more comprehensive than words, but the mind and soul is too narrow to conceive him. O then! how short a garment must all words, the most significant and comprehensive and superlative words be? Solomon's soul and heart was enlarged as the sand of the sea, but O it is not large enough for the Creator of it! "What is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?" Prov. xxx. 4. The Lord himself expresses it to our capacity, because we are not capable of what he can express, much less of what he is. If he should speak to us of himself as he is, O, it should be "dark sayings," hid from the understandings of all living! We could reach no more of it, but that it is a wonder, a secret. Here is the highest attainment of our knowledge, to know there is some mystery in it, but not what that mystery is. Christ hath a name above all names, how then can we know that name? It was well said by some of old, *Deus est πολυωνμοσ* and yet *ωνωνμοσ multorum nominum, et tamen nullius nominis*, he hath all names, and yet he hath no name. *quia est omnia, et tamen nihil omnium*, because he is all in all, and yet none of all, *Deus est quod vides, et quod non vides*. You may call him by all the works of his hands, for these are beams of his uncreated light, and streams of his inexhaustible sea of goodness, so that whatever perfection is in them, all that is eminently, yea, infinitely in him. Therefore saith Christ, "There is one good, even God and he calls himself 'the light of life,'" and therefore you have so many names of God in Scripture. There is no quality, no property, or virtue, that hath the least shadow of goodness, but he is that essentially, really, eternally, and principally, so that the creature deserves not such names but as they participate

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of his fulness. He is the true light, the true life, the sun is not that true light though it give light to the moon and to men, for it borrows its light and shining from him. All creatures are and shine but by reflection, therefore these names do agree to them but by a metaphor so to speak, the propriety and truth of them is in him. As it is but a borrowed kind of speech to call a picture or image a man—only because of the representation and likeness to him it communicates in one name with him—even so, in some manner, the creatures are but some shadows, pictures, or resemblances, and equivocal shapes of God, and whatever name they have of good, wise, strong, beautiful, true, or such like, it is borrowed speech from God whose image they have. And yet poor vain man would be wise,—thought wise really, intrinsically in himself, and properly,—calls himself so; which is as great an abuse of language as if the picture should call itself a true and living man. But then, as you may call him all things, because he is eminently and gloriously all that is in all, the fountain and end of all, yet we must again deny that he is any of these things. *Unus omnia, et nihil omnium.* We can find no name to him; or what can you call him, when you have said, “He is light?” You can form no other notion of him but from the resemblance of this created light. But alas! that he is not, he as infinitely transcends that, and is distant from it, as if he had never made it according to his likeness. His name is above all these names, but what it is himself knows, and knows only.

If ye ask what he is, we may glance at some notions and expressions to hold him out. In relation to the creatures, we may call him Creator, Redeemer, Light, Life, Omnipotent, Good, Merciful, Just, and such like; but if you ask, what is his proper name in relation to himself, *ipse novit*, himself knows that, we must be silent, and silence in such a subject is the rarest eloquence. But let us hear what the Lord himself speaks, in answer to this question. If any can tell, sure he himself knows his own name best. “I am (saith he) what I am.” *Sum qui sum.* “Go

tell them that I AM hath sent thee.” A strange answer, but an answer only pertinent for such a question. What should Moses make of this? What is he the wiser of his asking? Indeed he might be the wiser, it might teach him more by silence than all human eloquence could instruct him by speaking. His question was curious, and behold an answer short and dark, to confound vain and presumptuous mortality,—“I am what I am,” an answer that does not satisfy curiosity, for it leaves room for the first question, and What art thou? But abundant to silence faith and sobriety, that it shall ask no more, but sit down and wonder.

There are three things I conceive imported in this name: God's unsearchableness, God's unchangeableness, and God's absoluteness. His ineffability, his eternity, and his sovereignty and independent subsistence, upon whom all other things depend. I say,

1. His unsearchableness. You know it is our manner of speech when we would cover any thing from any, and not answer any thing distinctly to them, we say, “It is what it is, I have said what I have said, I will not make you wiser of it.” Here then is the fittest notion you can take up God into, to find him unsearchable beyond all understanding, beyond all speaking. The more ye speak or think, to find him always beyond what ye speak or think, whatever you discover of him, to conceive that infiniteness is beyond that, *ad finem cujus pertransire non potest*, the end of which you cannot reach, that he is an unmeasurable depth, a boundless ocean of perfection, that you can neither sound the bottom of it, nor find the breadth of it! Can a child wade the sea, or take it up in the hollow of its hand? Whenever any thing of God is seen, he is seen a wonder, “Wonderful is the name he is known by”. All our knowledge reacheth no further than admiration. “Who is like unto thee?” Exod. xv. 11, Psalm lxxxix. 6, 7, and admiration speaks ignorance. The greatest attainment of knowledge reacheth but to such a question as this, Who is like to thee? to know only that he is not like any other thing

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that we know, but not to know what he is. And the different degrees of knowledge are but in more admiration or less at his unconceivableness, and in more or less affection expressed in such pathetic interrogations, O who is like the Lord? How excellent is his name? Here is the greatest degree of saints knowledge here away, to ask with admiration and affection such a question that no answer can be given to or none that we can conceive or understand so as to satisfy wondering but such as still more increaseth it. There is no other subject but you may exceed it in apprehensions and in expressions. O how often are men's songs and thoughts and discourses above the matter! But here is a subject that there is no excess into; nay, there is no access unto it, let be excess in it. Imagination that can transcend the created heavens and earth, and fancy to itself millions of new worlds, every one exceeding another, and all of them exceeding this in perfection, yet it can do nothing here. That which at one instant can pass from the one end of heaven to the other, walk about the circumference of the heavens, and travel over the breadth of the sea, yet it can do nothing here. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Job xi. 7. Imagination cannot travel in these bounds, for his centre is everywhere, and his circumference nowhere, as an old philosopher speaks of God *Deus est, cujus centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam*. How shall it then find him out? There is nothing sure here, but to lose ourselves in a mystery, and to follow his majesty till we be swallowed up with an—*O altitudo!* O the depth and height and length and breadth of God! O the depth of his wisdom! O the height of his power! O the breadth of his love! And O the length of his eternity! It is not reason and disputation, saith Bernard, will comprehend these, but holiness, and that by stretching out the arms of fear and love, reverence and affection. What more dreadful than power that cannot be resisted, and wisdom that none can be hid from? and what more lovely than the love wherewith he hath so loved us, and his unchangeableness which admits of no suspicion? O fear

him who hath a hand that doth all, and an eye that beholds all things, and love him who hath so loved us, and cannot change! God hath been the subject of the discourses and debates of men in all ages; but oh! *Quam longe est in rebus qui est tam communis in vocibus?* How little a portion have men understood of him? How hath he been hid from the eyes of all living? Every age must give this testimony of him,—we have heard of his fame, but he is hid from the eyes of all living. I think, that philosopher that took it to his advisement, said more in silence than all men have done in speaking. Simonides being asked by Hiero, a king, what God was, asked a day to deliberate in and think upon it. When the king sought an account of his meditation about it, he desired yet two days more; and so as oft as the king asked him, he still doubled the number of the days in which he might advise upon it. The king wondering at this, asked what he meant by those delays; saith he, *Quanto magis considero, tanto magis obscurior mihi videtur*,—"the more I think on him, he is the more dark and unknown to me." This was more real knowledge than in the many subtle disputations of those men who, by their poor shell of finite capacity and reason, presume to empty the ocean of God's infiniteness, by finding out answers to all the objections of carnal reason against all those mysteries and riddles of the Deity. I profess, I know nothing can satisfy reason in this business, but to lead it captive to the obedience of faith, and to silence it with the faith of a mystery which we know not. Paul's answer is one for all, and better than all the syllogisms of such men, "Who art thou, O man! who disputest? Dispute thou: I will believe." *Ut intelligatur, tacendum est*. Silence only can get some account of God, quiet and humble ignorance in the admiration of such a majesty is the profoundest knowledge. *Non est mirum si ignoretur, majoris esset admirationis si sciatur*. It is no wonder that God is not known, all the wonder were to know and comprehend such a wonder, such a mystery. It is a wonder indeed, that he is not more known, but when I say so,

I mean that he is not more wondered at because he is passing knowledge. If our eyes of flesh cannot see any thing almost when they look straight and steadfastly upon the sun, O what can the eye of the soul behold, when it is fixed upon the consideration of that shining and glorious majesty! Will not that very light be as darkness to it, that it shall be as it were darkness and dazzled with a thick mist of light in *superlucente caligine*,—confounded with that resplendent darkness? It is said that the Lord “covers himself with light as with a garment,” Psal. civ. 2, and yet “clouds and darkness are round about him,” Psal. xcvi. 2, and he makes darkness his [covering] secret place, Psal. xviii. 11. His inaccessible light is this glorious darkness, that strikes the eyes of men blind; as in the darkness, the sun's light is the night owl's night and darkness. When a soul can find no better way to know him by, than by these names and notions by which we deny our own knowledge, when it hath conceived all of him it can, then, as being overcome with that dazzling brightness of his glory, to think him inconceivable and to express him in such terms as withal expresses our ignorance. There is no name agrees more to God, than that which saith, we cannot name him, we cannot know him, such as invisible, incomprehensible, infinite, &c. This, Socrates, an heathen, professed to be all his knowledge, that he knew he did know nothing, and therefore he preached an unknown God to the Athenians, to whom, after, they erected an altar with that inscription, “To the unknown God.” I confess, indeed, the most part of our discourses, of our performances, have such a writing on them, “to the unknown God!” because we think we know him, and so we know nothing. But oh! that Christians had so much knowledge of God, so much true wisdom, as solidly, and willingly to confess in our souls our own ignorance of him, and then I would desire no other knowledge, and growing in the grace of God, but to grow more and more in the believing ignorance of such a mystery, in the knowledge of an unknown, unconceivable and unsearchable God; that in all the

degrees of knowledge we might still conceive we had found less, and that there is more to be found than before we apprehended. This is the most perfect knowledge of God, that doth not drive away darkness, but increases it in the soul's apprehension. Any increase in it doth not declare what God is, or satisfy one's admiration in it, but rather shows him to be more invisible and unsearchable. So that the darkness of a soul's ignorance is more manifested by this light, and not more covered; and one's own knowledge is rather darkened, and disappears in the glorious appearance of this light. For in all new discoveries, there is no other thing appears but this, that that which the soul is seeking is supereminently unknown, and still further from knowledge than ever it conceived it to be. Therefore, whatever you conceive or see of God, if you think ye know what ye conceive and see, it is not God ye see, but something of God's less than God; for it is said, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what he hath laid up far them that love him." Now certainly, that is himself he hath laid up for them; therefore, whatever thou conceivest of him, and thinkest now thou knowest of him, that is not he; for it hath not entered into man's heart to conceive him. Therefore, this must be thy soul's exercise and progress in it, to remove all things, all conceptions from him, as not beseeming his majesty, and to go still forward in such a dark negative discovery, till thou know not where to seek him, nor find him. *Si quis Deum videat et intelligat quod vidit, Deum non vidit*, if any see God, and understand what they see, God they do not see; for, "God hath no man seen," 1 John iv. 12; "and no man knows the Father but the Son, and none knows the Son but the Father." It is his own property to know himself as it is to be himself. Silent and seeing ignorance is our safest and highest knowledge.