

OF GOD AND HIS PERFECTIONS.

JOHN iv. 24.—*God is a Spirit.*

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

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

* It will not be improper here to subjoin the following observation of the celebrated Mr. Addison. ‘If we consider the idea which wise men, by the light of reason, have framed of the Divine Being, it amounts to this, That he has in him all the perfections of a spiritual nature; and since we have no notion of any kind of spiritual perfection but what we discover in our own souls, we join infinitude to each kind of these perfections, and what is a faculty in a human soul becomes an attribute in God. We exist in place and time, the Divine Being fills the immensity of space with his presence, and inhabits eternity. We are possessed with a little power and a little know-

1. That a spirit is the most perfect and excellent of beings, more excellent than the body, or any thing that is purely material.

2. That a spirit is in its own nature immortal, having nothing in its frame and constitution tending to dissolution or corruption.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ledge, the Divine Being is almighty and omniscient. In short, by adding infinity to any kind of perfection we enjoy, and by joining all these different kinds of perfections in one being, we form our idea of the great Sovereign of nature.'

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

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

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

5. That externals in worship are of little value with God, who is a spirit, and requires the heart. They who would be accepted of God must worship him in spirit and in truth, that is, from an apprehension and saving knowledge of what he is in Christ to poor sinners. And this saving knowledge of God in Christ is attainable in this life: for it is the matter of the divine promise, 'I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord,' Jer. xxiv. 7. 'It is written in the prophets, They shall be all taught of God, John vi. 45. And therefore it should be most earnestly and assiduously sought after by us, as, unless we attain to it, we must perish for ever.

That we may know what sort of a spirit God is, we must consider his attributes, which we gather from his word and works, and that two ways: 1. By denying of, and removing from God, in our minds, all imperfection which is in the creatures, Acts xvii. 29. And thus we come to the knowledge of his incommunicable attributes, so called because there is no shadow or vestige of them in the creatures, such as infinity, eternity, unchangeableness. 2. By attributing unto him, by way of eminency, whatever is excellent in the creatures, seeing he is the fountain of all perfection in them,

Psal. xciv. 9. And thus we have his communicable attributes, whereof there are some vestiges and small scantlings in the creature, as being, wisdom, power, &c. amongst which his spirituality is to be reckoned.

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

We have said that God is a spirit; but angels and the souls of men are spirits too. What then is the difference between them? Why, God is an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable spirit; but angels and souls are but finite, were not from eternity, and are changeable spirits. Now, these three, infinity, eternity, and immutability, are God's incommunicable attributes, which we are next to explain.

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

Now God is infinite, (1.) In respect of his being: for of his nature our finite understandings cannot possibly form any adequate conception. This lies hid in rays of such bright and radiant glory, as must for ever dazzle the eyes of those who attempt to look into it. (2.) In respect of place; and therefore he is every where present: 'Can any man hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord: do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord,' Jer. xxiii. 24. (3.) In respect of time and duration: for the

ages of his eternity cannot be numbered, 'nor the number of his years searched out,' Job xxxvi. 26. (4.) In respect of all his communicable attributes. Thus the depth of his wisdom cannot be fathomed: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!' Rom. xi. 33. 'His greatness is unsearchable,' Psal. cxlv. 3. The extent of his power cannot be reached: 'The thunder of his power who can understand?' Job xxvi. 14. We cannot understand his powerful thunder, one of the lowest displays of his majesty in our region, much less the utmost extent and force of his power, in its terrible effects, especially the power of his anger: 'God is great, and we know him not.' The treasures of the divine goodness cannot be inventoried: 'O how great is thy goodness (says the Psalmist), which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! The brightness of God's glory cannot be described; as a full discovery of it would quite overpower the faculties of any mortal in this imperfect state: for man is weak and unworthy of it, weak and could not bear it, guilty and could not but dread it: and therefore God 'holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a cloud upon it, Job xxvi. 9. With what propriety, then did he say to Moses, 'Thou canst not see my face; for there shall no man see me, and live!' Exod. xxxiii. 20.

That God is infinite, is evident from the natural notions and dictates of the human mind. Hence the heathens, by the light of nature, attributed this perfection to the Divine Being. Thus one philosopher pronounced him to be a circle whose centre is every where, and whose circumference is no where; which another philosopher thus expressed in clearer terms, God is included in no place, and excluded from none. Which way soever ye turn, says Seneca, ye may take notice of God meeting you; for nothing is void of him: he himself fills all his works, and is present with the whole creation. Remarkable also is the expression of the prince of Latin poets, *Jovis omnia plena*, 'All things are full of God.' This also appears from several passages of scripture; as Deut. iv. 39. 'The Lord is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath.' 1 Kings viii. 27. 'The heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee,' says Solomon in his prayer to God at the dedication of the temple. See also Psal. cxxxix. 4, &c. Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. Again, if God were not infinite and immense, many gross absurdities would follow from the contrary notion; such as, it is inconsistent with his universal providence over the world, by which all things are preserved. 'In him we live, move and have our being,' Acts xvii. 27. As his

providence is over all, his essence must be equally diffusive. It is inconsistent with his supreme perfection. No perfection can be wanting in God: and therefore a limited essence, which is an imperfection, cannot be attributed to him. It is also inconsistent with his immutability: For if he move and recede from one place to another, would he not thereby be mutable? while yet 'with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' Last of all, it would be inconsistent with his omnipotence. That God can do every thing, is a notion settled in the minds of all; and his essence cannot be less or more confined than his power, and his power cannot be thought to extend farther than his essence.

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

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

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

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

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

First, There is his being which is his nature or essence and existence, which are but one thing in God. Creatures indeed have a being, but it is only a finite being, a being that has a beginning, a changeable one, and that may have an end. But God's being is an infinite being, eternal and unchangeable. Hence he calls himself, Exod. iii. 14. I AM THAT I AM. Hence we may infer,

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

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

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

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

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

Secondly, The next communicable attribute of God is wisdom.

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

The wisdom of God appears,

1. In the works of creation. The universe is a bright mirror wherein the wisdom of God may be clearly seen. 'The Lord by wisdom made the heavens,' Psal. cxxxvi. 5. 'The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens,' Prov. iii. 19. 'He hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion.' More particularly, the wisdom of God appears, (1.) In the vast variety of creatures which he hath made. Hence the Psalmist cries out, 'How manifold are thy works, O Lord! in wisdom hast thou made them all,' Psal. civ. 24. (2.) In the admirable and beautiful order and situation of the creatures. God hath marshalled every thing in its proper place and sphere. For instance, the sun, by its position displays the infinite wisdom of its Creator. It is placed in the midst of the planets, to enlighten them with its brightness, and inflame them with its heat, and thereby derive to them such benign qualities as make them beneficial to all mixed bodies. If it were raised as high as the stars, the earth would lose its prolific virtue, and remain a dead carcase for want of its quickening heat; and if it were placed as low as the moon, the air would be inflamed with its excessive heat, the waters would be dried up, and every planet scorched. But at the due distance at which it is placed, it purifies the air, abates the superfluities of the waters, temperately warms the earth, and so serves all the purposes of life and vegetation. It could not be in another position without the disorder and hurt of universal nature. Again, the expansion of the air from the ethereal heavens to the earth is another testimony of divine wisdom: for it is transparent and of a subtile nature, and so a fit medium to convey light and celestial influences to this lower world. Moreover, the situation of the earth doth also trumpet forth the infinite wisdom of its Divine Maker: for it is as it were the pavement of the world, and placed lowermost, as being the heaviest body, and fit to receive the weightiest matter. (3.) In fitting every thing for its proper end and use, so that nothing is unprofitable and useless. After the most diligent and accurate inquiry into the works of God, there is nothing to be found superfluous, and there is nothing defective. (4.) In the sub-

ordination of all its parts, to one common end. Though they are of different natures, as lines vastly distant in themselves, yet they all meet in one common centre, namely, the good and preservation of the whole, Hos. ii. 21, 22. 'I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel.'

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

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

man without prejudice to the other divine perfections. The pleas of Justice, said the wisdom of God, shall be satisfied in punishing, and the requests of Mercy shall be granted in pardoning. Justice shall not complain for want of punishment, nor Mercy for want of compassion; I will have an infinite sacrifice to content Justice, and the virtue and fruit of that sacrifice shall delight mercy. Here justice shall have punishment to accept, and Mercy shall have pardon to bestow. My Son shall die, and satisfy justice by his death; and by the virtue and merit of that sacrifice sinners shall be received into favour, and herein Mercy shall triumph and be glorified. Here was the most glorious display of wisdom. (2.) In the ordination of a Mediator every way fitly qualified to reconcile men unto God. A mediator must be capable of the sentiments and affections of both the parties he is to reconcile, and a just esteemer of the rights and injuries of the one and the other, and have a common interest in both. The Son of God, by his incarnation, perfectly possesses all these qualities. He hath a nature to please God, and a nature to please sinners. He had both the perfections of the Deity, and all the qualities and sinless infirmities of the humanity. The one fitted him for things pertaining to God, and the other furnished him with a sense of the infirmities of man.—This union of the divine and human nature in the person of Christ was necessary to fit and qualify him for the discharge of his threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King.—As a Prophet, it was requisite he should be God, that so he might acquaint us with his Father's will, and reveal the secret purposes and hidden counsels of heaven concerning our salvation, which were locked up in the bosom of God from all eternity. And it was needful he should be man, that he might converse with poor sinners in a familiar manner, and convey the mind and counsels of God to them, in such a way as they could receive them.—As a Priest, he behoved to be a man, that so he might be capable to suffer, and to bear the wrath which the sins of the elect had justly deserved. And it behoved him to be God, to render his temporary sufferings satisfactory. The great dignity and excellency of the divine Mediator's person made his sufferings of infinite value in God's account. Though he only suffered as a man, yet he satisfied as God.—As a King, he must be God, to conquer Satan, convert an elect world, and effectually subdue the lusts and corruptions of men. And he must be man, that by the excellency of his example, he might lead us in the way of life. (3.) In the manner whereby this redemption is accomplished, namely, by the humiliation of the Son of God. By this he counteracted the sin of angels and men. Pride is the poison of every sin: for in every transgression the creature prefers his

pleasure to and sets up his own will above God's. This was the special sin of Adam. The devil would have levelled heaven by usurpation. He said in his heart, *I will be like the Most High*; and man infected with his breath (when he said, *Ye shall be like gods*) became sick of the same disease. Now, the Divine Redeemer, that he might cure our disease in its source and cause by the quality of the remedy, applied to our pride an unspeakable humility. Man was guilty of the highest robbery in affecting to be equal with God; and the Son, who was in the bosom of God, and equal to him in majesty and authority, emptied himself by assuming the human nature in its servile state, Phil. ii. 6, 7, 8. It is said, John i. 14. 'The word was made flesh.' The meanest part of our nature is specified to signify the greatness of his abasement. There is such an infinite distance between God and flesh, that the condescension is as admirable as the contrivance. So great was the malignity of human pride, that such a profound humility was requisite for the cure of it. And by this Christ destroyed the works of the devil. (4.) In appointing such contemptible, and in appearance opposite means, to bring about such glorious effects. The way is as admirable as the work. Christ ruined the devil's empire by the very same nature that he had vanquished, and by the very means which he had made use of to establish and confirm it. He took not upon him the nature of angels, which is equal to Satan in strength and power; but he took part of flesh and blood, that he might the more signally triumph over that proud spirit in the human nature, which was inferior to his, and had been vanquished by him in paradise. For this end he did not immediately exercise omnipotent power to destroy him, but managed our weakness to foil the roaring lion. He did not enter the lists with Satan in the glory of his Deity, but disguised under the human nature which was subject to mortality. And thus the devil was overcome in the same nature over which he first got the victory. For as the whole race of mankind was captivated by him in Adam the representative, so believers are made victorious over him by the conquest which their representative obtained in the whole course of his sufferings. As our ruin was effected by the subtilty of Satan, so our recovery is wrought by the wisdom of God, who takes the wise in their own craftiness. Thus eternal life springs from death, glory from ignominy, and blessedness from a curse. We are healed by stripes, quickened by death, purchased by blood, crowned by a cross, advanced to the highest honour by the lowest humility, comforted by sorrows, glorified by disgrace, absolved by condemnation, and made rich by poverty. Thus the wisdom of God shines with a radiant brightness in the work of redemption.

I shall conclude this point with a few inferences.

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

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

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

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

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

The power of God appears,

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

2. In the preservation of the world, and all things therein. He 'upholdeth all things by the word of his power,' Heb. i. 3. He preserves all the creatures in their proper place, for their proper use

and end. It is by the Divine Power that the heavenly bodies have constantly rolled about in their spheres for so many ages, without wearing or moving out of their proper course; and that the tumultuous elements have persisted in their order to this very day. He preserves the confederacies of nature, sets bounds to the raging sea, and keeps it within its limits by a girdle of sand. He is the powerful preserver of man and beast. He preserves them in their kind and species, by the constant succession of them one after another; so that, though the individuals perish, yet the species continues. O what a mighty power must that be that sustains so many creatures, sets bounds to the raging sea, holds the wind in his fists, and preserves a comely order and sweet harmony among all the creatures!

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

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

2. In governing and managing the most stubborn creatures, as devils and wicked men. (1.) In his governing devils. They have great power, and are full of malice. The devil is always going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. We could

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

(3.) In raising up a church to himself in spite of all his enemies. This is specially seen in founding the New Testament church, and propagating the gospel through the world. The power of God appears admirable in planting the gospel, and converting the world to Christianity. For there were many and great difficulties in the way, as gross and execrable idolatry; and the nations were strongly confirmed and rooted in their idolatry, being trained up and inured to it from their infant state. It was as hard to make the Gentiles forsake the religion which they received from their birth, as to make the Africans change their skin, and the leopard his spots. The Pagan religion was derived from their progenitors through a long succession of ages. Hence the heathens accused the Christian religion of novelty, and urged nothing more plausibly than the argument of immemorial prescription for their superstition. They

would not consider whether it was just and reasonable, but with a blind deference yielded up themselves to the authority of the ancients. The pomp of the Pagan worship was very pleasing to the flesh; the magnificence of their temples, adorned with the trophies of superstition, their mysterious ceremonies, their music, their processions, their images and altars, their sacrifices and purifications, and the rest of the equipage of a carnal religion, drew their respects and strongly affected their minds through their senses. Whereas the religion of the gospel is spiritual and serious, holy and pure, and hath nothing to move the carnal part. There was then an universal depravation of manners among men; the whole earth was covered with abominations: the most unnatural lusts had lost the fear and shame that naturally attends them. We may see a melancholy picture of their most abandoned conversation, Rom. i. The powers of the world were bent against the gospel. The heathen philosophers strongly opposed it. When Paul preached at Athens, the Epicureans and Stoics entertained him with scorn and derision; 'What will this babbler say?' said they. The heathen priests conspired to obstruct it. The princes of the world thought themselves obliged to prevent the introduction of a new religion, lest their empire should be in hazard, or the greatness and majesty of it impaired thereby. If we consider the means by which the gospel was propagated, the Divine Power will evidently appear. The persons employed in this great work were a few illiterate fishermen, with a publican and a tent-maker, without authority and power to force men to obedience, and without the charms of eloquence to enforce the belief of the doctrines which they taught. Yet this doctrine prevailed, and the gospel had wonderful success through all the parts of the then known world, and that against all the power and policy of men and devils. Now, how could this possibly be, without a mighty operation of the power of God upon the hearts of men?

(4.) In preserving, defending, and supporting his church under the most terrible tempests of trouble and persecution which were raised against her. This is promised by our blessed Saviour, Matth. xvi. 18. 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' The most flourishing monarchies have decayed and wasted, and the strongest kingdoms have been broken in pieces; yet the church hath been preserved to this very day, notwithstanding all the subtle and potent enemies which in all ages have been pushing at her. Yea, God has preserved and delivered his church in the greatest extremities, when the danger in all human appearance was unavoidable; as in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in Esther's days, when a

bloody decree was issued to slay all the Jews. Yea, God hath sometimes delivered his church by very weak and contemptible-like instruments, such as Moses, a fugitive from Egypt, and Aaron, a poor captive in it; and sometimes by very unlikely means, as when he smote Egypt with armies of locusts and lice. In all ages of the world God has gloriously displayed his power in the preservation of his church and people, notwithstanding all the rage, power, and malice of their enemies.

(5.) In the conversion of the elect. Hence the gospel, which is the means and instrument of conversion, is called *the power of God*, and *the rod of his strength*; and the day of the success of the gospel in turning sinners to Christ, is called *the day of his power*, Psal. cx. 3. O what a mighty power must that be that stills the waves of a tempestuous sea, quells the lusts and stubbornness of the heart, demolishes the strong holds of sin in the soul, routs all the armies of corrupt nature, and makes the obstinate rebellious will strike sail to Christ! The power of God that is exerted here makes a man to think on other objects, and speak in another strain, than he did before. O how admirable is it, that carnal reason should be thus silenced; that legions of devils should be thus driven out; and that men should part with those sins which before they esteemed their chiefest ornaments, and stand at defiance with all the charming allurements and bitter discouragements of the world? The same power that raised Christ from the grave is exerted in the conversion of a sinner. Eph. i. 19, 20. There is greater power exerted in this case than there was in the creation of the world. For when God made the world, he met with no opposition; he spake the word, and it was done: but when he comes to convert a sinner, he meets with all the opposition which the devil and a corrupt heart can make against him. God wrought but one miracle in the creation: he spake the word and it was done; but there are many miracles wrought in conversion. The blind is made to see, the dead raised, and the deaf hears the voice of the Son of God. O the infinite power of Jehovah! In this work the mighty arm of the Lord is revealed.

(6.) In preserving the souls of believers amidst the many dangers to which they are exposed, and bringing them safely to glory at last. They have many enemies without, a legion of subtle and powerful devils, and a wicked and ensnaring world, with all its allurements and temptations; and they have many strong lusts and corruptions within; and their graces are but weak, and in their infancy and minority, while they are here: So that it may justly be matter of wonder how they are preserved. But the apostle tells us,

that they 'are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,' 1 Pet. i. 5. Indwelling corruption would soon quench grace in their hearts, if it were not kept alive by a divine power. But Christ hath pledged his faithfulness for it, that they shall be kept secure, John x. 28. It is his power that moderates the violence of temptations, supports his people under them, defeats the power of Satan, and bruises him under their feet.

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

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

(2.) In uniting the divine and human nature in the person of Christ, and that without any confusion of the two natures, or changing the one into the other. The two natures of Christ are not mixed together, as liquors that incorporate with one another, when poured into the same vessel. The divine nature is not turned into the human, nor the human into the divine. One nature doth not swallow up another, and make a third distinct from both. But they are distinct, and yet united; conjoined, and yet unmixed: the properties of each nature are preserved entire. O what a wonder of power was here! that two natures, a divine and a human, infinitely distant in themselves, should meet together in a personal conjunction! Here one equal with God is found in the form of a servant; here God and man are united in one; the Creator and the creature are miraculously allied in the same subsistence. Here a God of unmixed blessedness is linked personally with a man of perpetual sorrows. That is an admirable expression, 'The Word was made flesh,' John i. 14. What can be more miraculous than for God to become man, and man to become God? that a person possessed of all the perfections and excellencies of the Deity should inherit all the in-

firmities and imperfections of humanity, sin only excepted? Was there not need of infinite power, to bring together terms which were so far asunder? Nothing less than an omnipotent power could effect and bring about what an infinite and incomprehensible wisdom did project in this matter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fourthly, The next communicable attribute of God that falls to be considered is holiness, which is the absolute purity of his nature, whereby he delights in whatever is agreeable to his holy will, and in the resemblance of it that is in the creatures. Or, it is the perfect rectitude and integrity of the divine essence, whereby in all that he doth he acts like himself and for himself, delighting in whatever is agreeable to his will and nature, and abhorring whatever is contrary thereto. Hence he is said to be 'glorious in holiness,' Exod. xv. 11. And 'he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity,' Hab. i. 13. And he is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in holiness. Hence the heavenly host proclaim, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts,' Isa. vi. 3.

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

The holiness of God is manifested and discovered,

1. In his word; and that both in the precepts and promises thereof, God manifested his hatred and detestation of sin even in a variety of sacrifices under the ceremonial law; and the occasional washings and sprinklings upon ceremonial defilements, which polluted only the body, were a clear proof, that every thing that had a resemblance to evil was loathsome to God. All the legal sacrifices, washings, and purifications, were designed to express what an evil sin is, and how hateful and abominable it is to him. But the holiness of God is most remarkably expressed in the moral law. Hence *the law* is said to be *holy*, Rom. vii. 12. It is a true transcript of the holiness of God. And it is holy in its precepts. It requires an exact, perfect, and complete holiness in the whole man, in every faculty of the soul, and in every member of the body. It is holy in its prohibitions. It forbids and condemns all impurity and filthiness whatsoever. It discharges not only sinful words and actions, gross and atrocious crimes, and profane, blasphemous, and unprofitable speeches, but all sinful thoughts and irregular motions of the heart. Hence is that exhortation, Jer. iv. 14. ‘O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?’ It is holy in its threatenings. All these have their fundamental root in the holiness of God, and are a branch of this essential perfection. All the terrible threatenings annexed to the law are declarations of the holiness and purity of God, and of his infinite hatred and detestation of sin.

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

2. The holiness of God is manifested in his works. Hence the Psalmist saith, ‘The Lord is holy in all his works,’ Psal. cxlv. 17. More particularly,

(1.) The divine holiness appears in the creation of man. Solomon tells us, Eccl. vii. 29. that ‘God made man upright;’ and Moses says, that he was ‘made after the image of God,’ Gen. i. 27. Now, the image of God in man consists chiefly in holiness. Therefore the *new man* is said to be ‘created after God in righteousness and true holiness,’ Eph. iv. 24. Adam was made with a perfection of grace. There was an entire and universal rectitude in all its faculties, disposing them to their proper operations. There was no disorder among his affections, but a perfect agreement between the flesh and

the spirit; and they both joined in the service of God. He fully obeyed the first and great command, of loving the Lord with all his soul and strength, and his love to other things was regulated by his love to God. When Adam dropt from the creating finger of God, he had knowledge in his understanding, sanctity in his will, and rectitude in his affections. There was such a harmony among all his faculties, that his members yielded to his affections, his affections to his will, his will obeyed his reason, and his reason was subject to the law of God. Here then was a display of the divine purity.

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

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

[2.] In the punishment threatened and inflicted on man for his first apostasy from God. Man in his first state was the friend and favourite of heaven; by his extraction and descent he was the Son of God, a little lower than the angels; consecrated and crowned for the service of his Maker, and appointed as king over the inferior world; he was placed in paradise, the garden of God, and admitted to fellowship and communion with him. But sin hath divested him of all his dignity and glory. By his rebellion against his Creator, he made a forfeiture of his dominion, and so lost the obedience of the sensible creatures, and the service of the insensible. He was

thrust out of paradise, banished from the presence of God, and debarred from fellowship and communion with him. God immediately sentenced him and all his posterity to misery, death, and ruin. This is a clear demonstration of the infinite purity and holiness of God. But blessed be God, for Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who hath restored that which the first Adam took away.

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

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

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

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

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

(1.) The great dignity and excellency of his person. He was the eternal and only begotten Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. Yet he must descend from the throne of his majesty, divest himself of his robes of insupportable light, take upon him the form of a servant, become a curse, and bleed to death for sin. Did ever sin appear so hateful to God as here? To demonstrate God's infinite holiness, and hatred of sin, he would have the most glorious and most excellent person in heaven and earth to suffer for it. He would have his own Son to die on a disgraceful cross, and be exposed to the terrible flames of divine wrath, rather than sin should live, and his holiness remain for ever disparaged by the violations of his law.

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

(3.) The greatness of his sufferings. Indeed the extremity of his sufferings cannot be expressed. Insensible nature, as if it had been capable of understanding and affection, was disordered in its whole frame at his death. The sun forsook his shining, and clothed the whole heavens in black; so that the air was dark at noon-day, as if it had been midnight. The earth shook and trembled, the rocks were rent asunder, and universal nature shrank. Christ suffered all that wrath which was due to the elect for their sins. His sufferings were equivalent to those of the damned. He suffered a punishment of loss: for all the comforting influences of the Spirit were

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

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

manifest as in the sufferings of his own dear Son. This was a greater demonstration thereof than if all men and angels had suffered for it eternally in hell-fire.

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

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

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

3. God can have no gracious communion with unholy sinners; 'For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?' 2 Cor. vi. 14. It is simply impossible that an infinitely holy God should embrace vile polluted sinners that are not washed from their filthiness. They can have no fellowship with him here or hereafter. God will not give impure sinners one good look; for 'he is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity,' Hab. i. 13. All communion is founded on union, and union upon likeness. But what

likeness is there between a holy God and vile polluted creatures? Therefore they can never expect to have any communion with him, unless they be made clean. Hence they are directed to this, in order to their communion with God, Jam. iv. 8. 'Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.' 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

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

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

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

7. Is God infinitely and necessarily holy, so that he cannot but hate sin? then how admirable is the patience of God towards this

land, and the generation wherein we live? How much sin and wickedness abounds amongst us? Alas! all kinds of sin wofully prevail at this day among all ranks and degrees of persons, high and low, rich and poor, noble and ignoble; all have corrupted their way. Sins of a heinous nature are to be found among us, such as bid God defiance; horrid blasphemies, hideous oaths, vile adulteries, cruel oppressions, contempt of religion, and gross profanation of the Lord's day. Add to all these, ingratitude, worldliness, pride, and self-conceit among such as are more eminent for a profession of religion. All these are committed under a clear gospel-light, after signal mercies and deliverances, against the most solemn covenant engagements, personal and national, and against manifold rebukes and warnings from the word and providence of God. And alas! how are these sins increased and multiplied? Who can compute the number of the sins which one profane wretch is guilty of? But what are these to the sins of a whole city? and what are the sins of a whole city to the sins of the whole nation? Who can compute the number of the sins which Scotland is guilty of in one day? But what are these to the sins which have been committed for a great many years past? Ah! we are a people deeply laden with iniquity. O what matter of admiration is here, that God bears so long with us! His holiness and purity renders his patience the more astonishing. O the riches of his forbearance towards us! Admire it and adore it, and praise and bless him for it; and beware of abusing it, by taking liberty to go on in sin, because of it. Such an amazing patience, if abused, will render our judgment the more severe.

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

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

his dealings with them, particularly with man. Here God may be considered, 1. As a sovereign Lord; and, 2. As supreme governor and Judge of the world.

(1.) As sovereign Lord. And so he hath a right to do with his own what he will. He may order and dispose of all the creatures according to his pleasure, Dan. iv. 35. We are all in his hand as clay in the hand of the potter. He hath a sovereign and absolute right to use and dispose of us according to his own pleasure, to set bounds to our habitation, carve out our lot in the world, and set us high or low, in prosperity or adversity, as he pleaseth. It is so also, as to his dispensations of grace. He may give grace to whom he will, and withhold it from whom he will; and what he wills in that matter is just and right, because he wills it.

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

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

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

[1.] There is a remunerative or rewarding justice. God is just in rewarding the righteous. Psal. lviii. 11. 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous.' The saints shall not serve him for nought. Though they may be losers for him, yet they shall not be losers by him, Heb. vi. 10. 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.' He bountifully rewards his people's obedience, and their diligence and faithfulness in his service. Hence David says, Psal. xviii. 20. 'The Lord rewardeth me according to my righteousness.' Sometimes he rewards them with temporal blessings: for

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

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

The justice of God is manifested and discovered,

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

2. In sentencing so many of Adam's posterity to everlasting pains and torments for sin, according to that dreadful sentence which shall be pronounced at the last day, Matth. xxv. 41. 'Depart from

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

3. In the death and sufferings of Christ. God gave his beloved Son to the death for this end, that it might be known what a just and righteous God he is. So the apostle shews us, Rom. iii. 25. ' Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness,' &c. He set him forth in garments rolled in blood, to declare his justice and righteousness to the world. After man turned rebel, and apostatised from God, there was no way to keep up the credit and honour of divine justice, but either a strict execution of the law's sentence, or a full satisfaction. The execution would have destroyed the whole race of Adam. Therefore Christ stepped in, and made a sufficient satisfaction by his death and sufferings, that so God might exercise his mercy without prejudice to his justice. Thus the blood of the Son of God must be shed for sin, to let the world see that he is a just and righteous God. The justice of God could and would be satisfied with no less. Hence it is said, Rom. viii. 32. ' God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the death for us all.' If forbearance might have been expected from any, surely it might from God, who is full of pity and tender mercy : yet God in this case spared him not. If one might have expected sparing mercy and abatement from any, surely Christ might most of all expect it from his own Father ; yet God spared not his own Son. Sparing mercy is the lowest degree of mercy ; yet it was denied to Christ, when he stood in the room of the elect. God abated him not a minute of the time appointed for his sufferings, nor one degree of the wrath which he was to bear. Nay, though in the garden, when Christ fell on the ground, and put up that lamentable and pitiful cry, ' Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me ;' yet no abatement was granted to him. The Father of mercies saw his dear Son humbled in his presence, and yet dealt with him in extreme severity. The sword of justice was in a manner asleep before, in all the terrible judgments which had been executed on the world, but now it must be awakened and

roused up to pierce the heart of the blessed Redeemer. Hence it is said, Zech. xiii. 7. 'Awake O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd.' If divine justice had descended from heaven in a visible form, and hanged up millions of sinners in chains of wrath, it had not been such a demonstration of the wrath of God, and his hatred of sin, as the death and sufferings of his own Son. When we hear that God exposed his own Son to the utmost severity of wrath and vengeance, may we not justly cry out O the infinite evil of sin! O the inflexible severity of divine justice! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

4. The justice of God will be clearly manifested at the great day. God hath reared up many trophies already to the honour of his power and justice out of the ruins of his most insolent enemies: but then will be the most solemn triumph of divine justice. The apostle tells us, Acts xvii. 31. that 'he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.' On that awful day the justice and righteousness of God shall be clearly revealed, therefore it is called 'the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God,' Rom. ii. 5. The equity of God's dealings and dispensations is not now so fully seen: but all will be open and manifest on that day. Then he will liberally reward the righteous, and severely punish the wicked.

5. God's justice will shine for ever in the torments of the damned in hell. The smoke of their furnace, their yellings and roarings, will proclaim through eternity the inexorable justice and severity of God. It is not enough for the satisfaction of his justice to deprive them of heaven and happiness; but he will inflict the most tormenting punishment upon sense and conscience in hell. For as both soul and body were guilty in this life, the one as the guide, the other as the instrument of sin, so it is but just and equal that they should both feel the penal effects of it hereafter. Sinners shall then be tormented in that wherein they most delighted: they shall then be invested with those objects which will cause the most dolorous perceptions in their sensitive faculties. The lake of fire and brimstone, the blackness of darkness, for ever, are words of a terrible signification. But no words can fully express the terrible ingredients of their misery. Their punishment will be in proportion to the glory of God's majesty that is provoked, and the extent of his power. And as the soul was the principal, and the body but an accessory in the works of sin; so its capacious faculties shall be far

more tormented than the limited faculties of the outward senses. The fiery attributes of God shall be transmitted through the glass of conscience, and concentrated upon damned spirits. The fire without will not be so tormenting as the fire within them. Then all the tormenting passions will be inflamed. What rancour, reluctance, and rage, will there be against the just power that sentenced them to hell! what impatience and indignation against themselves for their wilful and inexcusable sins, the just cause of it! how will they curse their creation, and wish their utter extinction as the final remedy of their misery! But all their ardent wishes will be in vain. For the guilt of sin will never be expiated, nor God so far reconciled as to annihilate them. As long as there is justice in heaven, or fire in hell, as long as God and eternity shall continue, they must suffer those torments which the strength and patience of an angel cannot bear one hour. The justice of God will blaze forth for ever in the agonies and torments of the damned.

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

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

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

2. God doth not always let the wicked prosper in their sin. There are some whom he punisheth openly, that his justice may be observed by all. Hence the Psalmist saith, 'The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands,' Psal. ix. 16. Sometimes their prosperity is but short lived, and they are suddenly cast down, as the Psalmist remarks, Psal. lxxiii. 18, 19, 20. His justice is seen striking men dead sometimes in the very act of sin; as in the case of Zimri and Cozbi, Pharaoh, Sennacherib, &c.

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

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

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

Ans. 1. The ways of God’s judgments, though they are sometimes secret, yet they are never unjust. God doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. There are culpable causes in them from which their afflictions spring. They have their spots and blemishes as well as others. Though they may be free from gross and atrocious crimes, yet they are guilty of much pride and passion, censoriousness, worldliness, &c. And the sins of God’s people are more provoking in his sight than the sins of other men. And God will not suffer them to pass without correction, Amos iii. 2. ‘ You only have I known of all the families of the earth ; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.’ This justifies God in all the evils that befall them.

2. All the trials and sufferings of the godly are designed to refine and purify them, to promote their spiritual and eternal good, Heb.

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

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

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

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

1. Christ had absolute power to dispose of himself. One reason why a man is not allowed to lay down his life for another is, because his life is not at his own disposal. But Christ was absolute

lord of his own life, and had power to keep it or lay it down as he pleased. So he declares, John x. 18. 'No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.'

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

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

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

Object. 4. How is it consistent with the justice of God to punish temporary sins with eternal torments in hell? Some think it hard, and scarcely consistent with infinite justice, to inflict eternal punishment for sins committed in a little time. But to clear the justice of God in this, consider,

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

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

3. The punishment of the damned must be eternal, because of the immense guilt and infinite evil of sin. It is owned by common reason, that there ought to be a proportion between the quality of the offence and the degree of the punishment. Justice takes the scales into its hand before it takes the sword. It is a rule in all sorts of judicature, that the degrees of an offence arise according to

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

4. Their punishment must be eternal: for they will remain for ever unqualified for the least favour. The damned are not changed in hell, but continue their hatred and blasphemies against God. The seeds of this are in obstinate sinners here in the world, who are styled *haters of God*: but in the damned this hatred is direct and explicit; the fever is heightened into a phrenzy. The glorious and ever-blessed God is the object of their curses and eternal aversion. Our Lord tells us, that in hell 'there is weeping and gnashing of teeth,' *i. e.* extreme sorrow and extreme fury. Despair and rage are the proper passions of lost souls. For when the guilty sufferers are so weak, that they cannot by patience endure their torments, nor by strength resist the power that inflicts them, and withal are wicked and stubborn, they are enraged and irritated by their misery, and foam out blasphemies against the righteous Judge.

We may apply to this purpose what is said of the worshippers of the beast, Rev. xvi. 10, 11. 'They gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.' The torment and blasphemies of these impenitent idolaters are a true representation of the state of the damned. Now, as they will always sin; so they must always suffer. On these accounts, then, it is agreeable to the wisdom and justice of God that their pains and torments be eternal.

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

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

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

(2.) This appears from scripture assertions and examples. [1.] Consider scripture examples and declarations, such as Rev. xvi. 5. 'Thou art righteous, O Lord, because thou hast judged, Rom. ii. 5. — 'The righteous judgment of God,' 2 Thess. i. 6. 'It is a righteous thing with God to recompence with tribulation,' Heb. ii. 2. 'Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward,' Heb. xii. 29. 'Our God is a consuming fire,' Rom. i. 32. 'Knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death.' Compare Gen. xviii. 25. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' [2.] Think upon scripture-examples, with respect to this matter. The angels, the flower and glory of the creation, the first-born of intelligent beings, when they revolted from their Maker, were doomed and cast into hell, where they lie reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the last day. Our first parents, and in them all their posterity, because of their apostasy, were sentenced to death and misery. The old world, except eight persons, were swept off the face of the earth, by a devouring deluge, on account of their impiety. Sodom and Gomorrah were by fire from heaven consumed to ashes, because of their vile uncleanness. The Egyptians sunk under multiplied

plagues, because they hardened themselves against the Lord, and would not let Israel go. Yea, the Israelites themselves met with many severe judgments in the wilderness, in Canaan, and in Babylon, because they rebelled against the Lord their God. In a word, this people at last, for murdering the Messiah, and rejecting the gospel, were destroyed with a great destruction at the siege of Jerusalem, where eleven thousand perished by sword, famine, and pestilence, and very near a hundred thousand more were carried away captive.

3. This appears from the nature of God, which carries in it the utmost detestation of sin; and this necessarily produces punishment. 'Upon the wicked God will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest,' Psal. xi. 6. Now the reason of all this holy severity is given in the very next verse, 'For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.' His holy nature prompts him to love righteousness, and consequently to hate and punish all unrighteousness.

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

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

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

1. Is God infinitely just? Then there is a judgment to come. The justice of God requires that men should reap according to what they have sown; that it should be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked. But it is not apparently so now in this present world. Here things are out of course; sin is rampant, and runs with a rapid violence. Many times the most guilty sinners are not

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

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

3. Is God infinitely just? Then we must not expostulate with or demand a reason of his actions. He hath not only authority on his side, but justice and equity. In all his dispensations towards men, however afflictive they be, he is just and righteous. He layeth judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, Isa. xxviii. 17. It is below him to give an account to us of any of his proceedings. The plumb-line of our reason is too short to fathom the great

depths of God's justice : for his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out, Rom. xi. 33. We are to adore his justice, where we cannot see the reason of it. God's justice hath often been wronged, but never did wrong to any. How unreasonable, then, is it for men to expostulate with and dispute against God ?

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

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

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

Sixthly, The *goodness* of God is the next communicable attribute that falls to be considered. The divine goodness is that essential property whereby he is altogether good in himself, and the author of all good to his creatures : *Thou art good, and dost good*, says the Psalmist, Ps. cxix. 68. There is a twofold goodness of God ; his absolute and his relative goodness.

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

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

The goodness of God is manifested,

1. In creation. There is no other perfection of the divine nature so eminently visible in the whole book of the creatures as this is.

His goodness was the cause that he made any thing, and his wisdom was the cause that he made every thing in order and harmony. Here the goodness of God shines with a glorious lustre. All the varieties of the creatures which he hath made are so many beams and apparitions of his goodness. It was great goodness to communicate being to some things without himself, and to extract such a multitude of things from the depths of nothing, and to give life and breath to some of these creatures. Divine goodness formed their natures, beautified and adorned them with their several ornaments and perfections, whereby every thing was enabled to act for the good of the common world. Every creature hath a character of divine goodness upon it. The whole world is a map to represent, and a herald to proclaim, this amiable perfection of God. But the goodness of God is manifested especially in the creation of man. He raised him from the dust by his almighty power, and placed him in a more sublime condition, and endued him with choicer prerogatives, than the rest of the creatures. What is man's soul and body but like a cabinet curiously carved, with a rich and precious gem inclosed in it! God hath made him an abridgment of the whole creation: the links of the two worlds, heaven and earth, are united in him. He communicates with the earth in the dust of his body, and he participates with the heavens in the crystal of his soul. He has the life of angels in his reason, and that of animals in his sense. Further, the divine goodness is manifested in making man after his image, in furnishing the world with so many creatures for his use, in giving him dominion over the works of his hands, and making him lord of this lower world.

2. In our redemption by Jesus Christ. O what astonishing goodness was it for the great and glorious God to give his only begotten Son to the death for such vile rebels and enemies as we all are by nature! The goodness of God, under the name of his love, is rendered as the only cause of our redemption by Christ, John iii. 16. 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.' This is an inexpressible *so*, a *so* that all the angels of heaven cannot analyse. None can conceive or understand the boundless extent and dimensions of it. God gave Christ for us to commend his love, and set it off with an admirable lustre. 'God commended his love towards us (saith the apostle), in that while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us.' O what an expensive goodness and love was this! Our redemption cost God more than what was laid out on the whole creation. 'The redemption of the soul is precious,' says the Psalmist. 'We are not redeemed with corruptible things,

cast anchor. Here would be a continual confusion, and the ship must needs perish. The order and harmony of the world, the constant and uniform government of all things, is a plain argument, that there is but one only Omnipotent being that rules all.

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

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

And this should be observed against those who pretend, that the Father is the most high God, and that there is no most high God but one, yet that there is another true God, viz. Christ, who in

very deed, as to them, is but a mere man; yet they pretend he is the true God. Christ is God, and the true and most high God. But, in opposition to them, consider that to be a man and to be a God are opposite, and cannot be said of one in respect of one nature, Jer. xxxi. 3. Acts xiv. 15. Jer. x. 11.

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

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

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

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

(3.) Atheism is of pernicious consequence both to others and to the atheist himself. To others: for (1.) It would root out the foundation of government, and demolish all order among men. The being of God is the great guard of the world: for it is the sense of a Deity, upon which all civil order in cities and kingdoms is founded. Without this, there is no tie upon the consciences of men to restrain them from the most atrocious impieties and villanies. A city of

atheists would be a heap of confusion. There could be no traffic nor commerce, if all the sacred bonds of it in the consciences of men were thus snapt asunder by denying the existence of God. (2.) It is introductive of all evil into the world. If you take away God, you take away conscience, and thereby all rules of good and evil. And how could any laws be made, when the measure and standard of them is removed? for all good laws are founded upon the dictates of conscience and reason, and upon common sentiments in human nature, which spring from a sense of God. So that if the foundation be destroyed, the whole superstructure must needs tumble down. A man might be a thief, a murderer, and an adulterer, and yet in a strict sense not be an offender. The worst of actions could not be evil, if a man were a god to himself. Where there is no sense of God, the bars are removed, and the flood gates of all impiety rush in upon mankind. The whole earth would be filled with violence, and all flesh would corrupt their way.

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

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

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

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

Inf. 4. Seeing God is one, he should be the centre of our affections, love, fear, delight, joy, &c. Deut. vi. 4, 5. 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.'

I shall conclude all with a few directions.

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

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

Another opinion tending to atheism is, the denying of God's providence in the government of the world. Some make him an idle spectator of what is done here below, asserting that he is contented with his own blessedness and glory, and that whatever is without him is neither in his thoughts nor care. Many think that this world is but as a great clock or machine, which was set a-going at first by God, and afterwards left to its own motion. But if ye exempt any thing from the dominion of providence, then you will soon run into all manner of libertinism. If Satan and wicked men may do what they will, and God be only a looker-on, and not concerned with human affairs, then ye may worship the devil, lest he hurt you, and fear men though God be propitious to you.

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

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

4. Study God in the creatures as well as in the scriptures. The creatures were all made to be heralds of the divine glory, and his glorious being and perfections appear evidently in them. Hence saith the Psalmist, Psal. xix. 1—4. 'The heavens declare the glory of God? and the firmament sheweth his handy-work, day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech, nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world: in them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun.' The world is sometimes compared to a book, and sometimes to a preacher. The universe is like a great printed book, wherein God sets forth himself to our view; and the great diversity of creatures which are in it, are so many letters, out of which we may spell his name. And they all preach loudly unto us the glorious being and excellencies of God. And therefore the apostle tells us, Rom. i. 20. 'The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.' In the book of the creatures God hath written a part of the excellency of his name; and you should learn to read God wherever he hath made himself legible to you.

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

OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

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

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

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

The doctrine evidently arising from the words is,

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

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

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