

PRACTICAL ATHEISM.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.—Ps. XIV. 1.

Doct. 2. Practical atheism is natural to man in his depraved state, and very frequent in the hearts and lives of men.

‘The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.’ He regards him as little as if he had no being. He said in his heart, not with his tongue, nor in his head; he never firmly thought it, nor openly asserted it; shame put a bar to the first, and natural reason to the second. Yet perhaps he had sometimes some doubts whether there were a God or no; he wished there were not any, and sometimes hoped there were none at all. He could not raze out the notion of a deity in his mind, but he neglected the fixing the sense of God in his heart, and made it too much his business to deface and blot out those characters of God in his soul which had been left under the ruins of original nature.

Men may have atheistical hearts without atheistical heads. Their reasons may defend the notion of a deity, while their hearts are empty of affection to the Deity; Job’s children may ‘curse God in their hearts,’ Job i. 5, though not with their lips.

‘There is no God.’ Most understand it of a denial of the providence of God, as I have said in opening the former doctrine.

He denies some essential attribute of God, or the exercise of that attribute in the world.*

He that denies any essential attribute may be said to deny the being of God. Whosoever denies angels or men to have reason and will, denies the human and angelical nature, because understanding and will are essential to both those natures; there could neither be angel nor man without them. No nature can subsist without the perfections essential to that nature, nor God be conceived of without his. The apostle tells us, Eph. ii. 12, that the Gentiles were ‘without God in the world.’ So in some sense all unbelievers may be termed atheists; for rejecting the mediator appointed by God, they reject that God who appointed him.

But this is beyond the intended scope, natural atheism being the only subject; yet this is deducible from it, that the title of ἀθεοι doth not only belong to those who denied the existence of God, or to those who contemn all sense of a deity, and would root the conscience and reverence of God out of their souls, but it belongs also to these who give not that worship to God which is due to him; who worship many gods, or who worship one

* So the Chaldee reads, לית שולטנא, *non potestas*, denying the authority of God in the world.

God in a false and superstitious manner ; when they have not right conceptions of God, nor intend an adoration of him according to the excellency of his nature. All those that are unconcerned for any particular religion fall under this character ; though they own a God in general, yet are willing to acknowledge any god that shall be coined by the powers under whom they live. The Gentiles were without God in the world ; without the true notion of God, not without a god of their own framing.

This general or practical atheism is natural to men.

1. Not natural by created, but by corrupted, nature. It is against nature, as nature came out of the hand of God ; but universally natural, as nature hath been sophisticated and infected by the serpent's breath. Inconsideration of God, or misrepresentations of his nature, are as agreeable to corrupt nature as the disowning the being of a God is contrary to common reason. God is not denied *naturâ sed vitiis*.*

2. It is universally natural : ' The wicked are estranged from the womb,' Ps. lviii. 2, ' They go astray as soon as they be born, their poison is like the poison of a serpent.' The wicked ; and who by his birth hath a better title ? They go astray from the dictates of God and the rule of their creation as soon as ever they be born ; their poison is like the poison of a serpent, which is radically the same in all of the same species. It is seminally and fundamentally in all men, though there may be a stronger restraint by a divine hand upon some men than upon others. This principle runs through the whole stream of nature. The natural bent of every man's heart is distant from God ; when we attempt anything pleasing to God, it is like the climbing up a hill against nature ; when anything is displeasing to him, it is like a current running down the channel in its natural course ; when we attempt anything that is an acknowledgment of the holiness of God, we are fain to rush with arms in our hands through a multitude of natural passions, and fight the way through the oppositions of our own sensitive appetite. How softly do we naturally sink down into that which sets us at a greater distance from God ! There is no active, potent, efficacious sense of a God by nature. ' The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil,' Eccl. viii. 11 ; *the heart* in the singular number, as if there were but one common heart beat in all mankind, and bent, as with one pulse, with a joint consent and force to wickedness, without a sense of the authority of God in the earth ; as if one heart acted every man in the world.

The great apostle cites the text to verify the charge he brought against all mankind, Rom. iii. 9-12. In his interpretation, the Jews, who owned one God, and were dignified with special privileges, as well as the Gentiles, that maintained many gods, are within the compass of this character. The apostle leaves out the first part of the text, ' The fool hath said in his heart,' but takes in the latter part, and the verses following. He charges all, because all, every man of them, was under sin : ' There is none that seeks God ;' and, ver. 19, he adds, ' What the law saith, it speaks to those that are under the law,' that none should imagine he included only the Gentiles, and exempted the Jews from this description. The leprosy of atheism had infected the whole mass of human nature. No man among Jews or Gentiles did naturally seek God, and therefore all were void of any spark of the practical sense of the deity. The effects of this atheism are not in all externally of an equal size ; yet, in the fundamentals and radicals of it, there is not a hair's difference between the best and the worst men that ever traversed the world. The distinction is laid either in the common grace, bounding and suppressing it ; or in special grace, killing and crucifying it.

* Augustin. de Civit. Dei.

It is in every one either triumphant or militant, reigning or deposed. No man is any more born with sensible acknowledgments of God than he is born with a clear knowledge of the nature of all the stars in the heavens or plants upon the earth. 'None seeks after God.' None seeks God as his rule, as his end, as his happiness, which is a debt the creature naturally owes to God; he desires no communion with God; he places his happiness in anything inferior to God; he prefers everything before him, glorifies everything above him; he hath no delight to know him; he regards not those paths which lead to him; he loves his own filth better than God's holiness; his actions are tinctured and dyed with self, and are void of that respect which is due from him to God.

The noblest faculty of man, his understanding, wherein the remaining lineaments of the image of God are visible, the highest operation of that faculty, which is wisdom, is in the judgment of the Spirit of God 'devilish,' while it is 'earthly and sensual,' James iii. 15. And the wisdom of the best man is no better by nature; a legion of impure spirits possess it; devilish as the devil, who though he believe there is a God, yet acts as if there were none, and wishes he had no superior to prescribe him a law, and inflict that punishment upon him which his crimes have merited. Hence the poison of man by nature is said to be like 'the poison of a serpent,' alluding to that serpentine temptation which first infected mankind, and changed the nature of man into the likeness of that of the devil, Ps. lviii. 4. So that notwithstanding the harmony of the world, that presents men not only with the notice of the being of a God, but darts into their minds some remarks of his power and eternity, yet the thoughts and reasonings of man are so corrupt, as may well be called diabolical, and as contrary to the perfection of God and the original law of their nature, as the actings of the devil are; for since every natural man is a child of the devil, and is acted by the diabolical spirit, he must needs have that nature which his father hath, and the infusion of that venom which the spirit that acts him is possessed with, though the full discovery of it may be restrained by various circumstances, Eph. ii. 2. To conclude: though no man, or at least very few, arrive to a round and positive conclusion in their hearts that there is no God, yet there is no man that naturally hath in his heart any reverence of God.

In general, before I come to a particular proof, take some propositions.

Prop. 1. Actions are a greater discovery of a principle than words. The testimony of works is louder and clearer than that of words, and the frame of men's hearts must be measured rather by what they do than by what they say. There may be a mighty distance between the tongue and the heart, but a course of actions is as little guilty of lying as interest is, according to our common saying. All outward impieties are the branches of an atheism at the root of our nature, as all pestilential sores are expressions of the contagion in the blood. Sin is therefore frequently called ungodliness in our English dialect. Men's practices are the best indexes of their principles. The current of a man's life is the counterpart of the frame of his heart: who can deny an error in the spring or wheels, when he perceives an error in the hand of the dial? Who can deny atheism in the heart, when so much is visible in the life? The taste of the water discovers what mineral it is strained through. A practical denial of God is worse than a verbal, because deeds have usually more of deliberation than words; words may be the fruit of a passion, but a set of evil actions are the fruit and evidence of a predominant evil principle in the heart. All slighting words of a prince do not argue an habitual treason, but a succession of overt treasonable attempts signify a

settled treasonable disposition in the mind. Those, therefore, are more deservedly termed atheists, who acknowledge a God and walk as if there were none, than those (if there can be any such) that deny a God, and walk as if there were one.

A sense of God in the heart would burst out in the life. Where there is no reverence of God in the life, it is easily concluded there is less in the heart.

What doth not influence a man when it hath the addition of the eyes and censures of outward spectators, and the care of a reputation (so much the god of the world), to strengthen it and restrain the action, must certainly have less power over the heart when it is single, without any other concurrence. The flames breaking out of a house discover the fire to be much stronger and fiercer within. The apostle judgeth those of the circumcision, who gave heed to Jewish fables, to be deniers of God, though he doth not tax them with any notorious profaneness: Tit. i. 16, 'They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him;' he gives them epithets contrary to what they arrogated to themselves.* They boasted themselves to be holy, the apostle calls them abominable. They bragged that they fulfilled the law, and observed the traditions of their fathers; the apostle calls them disobedient, or unpersuadable. They boasted that they only had the rule of righteousness, and a sound judgment concerning it; the apostle said they had a reprobate sense, and unfit for any good work; and judges against all their vain-glorious brags, that they had not a reverence of God in their hearts; there was more of the denial of God in their works, than there was acknowledgment of God in their words. Those that have neither God in their thoughts, nor in their tongues, nor in their works, cannot properly be said to acknowledge him. Where the honour of God is not practically owned in the lives of men, the being of God is not sensibly acknowledged in the hearts of men. The principle must be of the same kind with the actions; if the actions be atheistical, the principle of them can be no better.

Prop. 2. All sin is founded in a secret atheism. Atheism is the spirit of every sin; all the flood of impieties in the world break in at the gate of a secret atheism; and though several sins may disagree with one another, yet like Herod and Pilate against Christ, they join hand in hand against the interest of God. Though lusts and pleasures be divers, yet they are united in disobedience to him, Tit. iii. 3. All the wicked inclinations in the heart, and struggling motions, secret repinings, self-applauding confidences in our own wisdom, strength, &c., envy, ambition, revenge, are sparks from this latent fire; the language of every one of these is, I would be a lord to myself, and would not have a God superior to me.

The variety of sins against the first and second table, the neglects of God, and violences against man, are derived from this in the text, first, 'The fool hath said in his heart,' and then follows a legion of devils. As all virtuous actions spring from an acknowledgment of God, so all vicious actions rise from a lurking denial of him. All licentiousness goes glib down where there is no sense of God. Abraham judged himself not secure from murder, nor his wife from defilement in Gerar, if there were no fear of God there, Gen. xx. 11. He that makes no conscience of sin has no regard to the honour, and consequently none to the being, of God. 'By the fear of God men depart from evil,' Prov. xvi. 6. By the non-regarding of God men rush into evil. Pharaoh oppressed Israel because he knew not the Lord. If he did not deny the being of a deity, yet he had such an unworthy notion of God as was inconsistent with the nature of a deity; he, a poor creature, thought himself a mate for the Creator.

* Illyric.

In sins of omission we own not God, in neglecting to perform what he enjoins. In sins of commission we set up some lust in the place of God, and pay to that the homage which is due to our Maker. In both we disown him; in the one by not doing what he commands, in the other by doing what he forbids.

We deny his sovereignty when we violate his laws; we disgrace his holiness when we cast our filth before his face; we disparage his wisdom when we set up another rule as the guide of our actions than that law he hath fixed; we slight his sufficiency when we prefer a satisfaction in sin before a happiness in him alone, and his goodness, when we judge it not strong enough to attract us to him. Every sin invades the rights of God, and strips him of one or other of his perfections. It is such a vilifying of God as if he were not God; as if he were not the supreme creator and benefactor of the world; as if we had not our being from him; as if the air we breathed in, the food we lived by, were our own by right of supremacy, not of donation: for a subject to slight his sovereign is to slight his royalty; or a servant a master, is to deny his superiority.

Prop. 3. Sin implies that God is unworthy of a being. Every sin is a kind of cursing God in the heart, Job i. 5; an aim at the destruction of the being of God, not actually, but virtually; not in the intention of every sinner, but in the nature of every sin. That affection which excites a man to break his law, would excite him to annihilate his being if it were in his power. A man in every sin aims to set up his own will as his rule, and his own glory as the end of his actions, against the will and glory of God; and could a sinner attain his end, God would be destroyed: God cannot out-live his will and his glory; God cannot have another rule but his own will, nor another end but his own honour. Sin is called a 'turning the back' upon God, Jer. xxxii. 33; a 'kicking against him,' Deut. xxxii. 15; as if he were a slighter person than the meanest beggar. What greater contempt can be shewed to the meanest, vilest person, than to turn the back, lift up the heel, and thrust away with indignation? All which actions, though they signify that such a one hath a being, yet they testify also that he is unworthy of a being, that he is an unuseful being in the world, and that it were well the world were rid of him.

All sin against knowledge is called a reproach of God, Num. xv. 10, Ezek. xx. 27. Reproach is a vilifying a man as unworthy to be admitted into company. We naturally judge God unfit to be conversed with. God is the term turned from by a sinner; sin is the term turned to; which implies a greater excellency in the nature of sin than in the nature of God. And as we naturally judge it more worthy to have a being in our affections, so consequently more worthy to have a being in the world, than that infinite nature from whom we derive our beings, and our all, and upon whom with a kind of disdain we turn our backs. Whosoever thinks the notion of a deity unfit to be cherished in his mind by warm meditation, implies that he cares not whether he hath a being in the world or no. Now though the light of a deity shines so clearly in man, and the stings of conscience are so smart, that he cannot absolutely deny the being of a God, yet most men endeavour to smother this knowledge, and make the notion of a God a sapless and useless thing: Rom. i. 28, 'They like not to retain God in their knowledge.'

It is said Cain 'went out from the presence of the Lord,' Gen. iv. 16; that is, from the worship of God. Our refusing or abhorring the presence of a man implies a carelessness whether he continue in the world or no, it is a using him as if he had no being, or as if he were not concerned in it. Hence all men in Adam, under the emblem of the prodigal, are said to go

into a far country. Not in respect of place, because of God's omnipresence, but in respect of acknowledgment and affection; they mind and love anything but God. And the descriptions of the nations of the world, lying in the ruins of Adam's fall, and the dregs of that revolt, is that they know not God; they forget God, as if there were no such being above them; and indeed, he that doth the works of the devil, owns the devil to be more worthy of observance, and consequently of a being, than God, whose nature he forgets, and whose presence he abhors.

Prop. 4. Every sin in its own nature would render God a foolish and impure being. Many transgressors esteem their acts, which are contrary to the law of God, both wise and good; if so, the law against which they are committed must be both foolish and impure. What a reflection is there then upon the law-giver! The moral law is not properly a mere act of God's will considered in itself, or a tyrannical edict, like those of whom it may well be said, *stat pro ratione voluntas*, but it commands those things which are good in their own nature, and prohibits those things which are in their own nature evil, and therefore is an act of his wisdom and righteousness, the result of his wise counsel, and an extract of his pure nature; as all the laws of just lawgivers are not only the acts of their will, but of a will governed by reason and justice, and for the good of the public, whereof they are conservators. If the moral commands of God were only acts of his will, and had not an intrinsic necessity, reason, and goodness, God might have commanded the quite contrary, and made a contrary law, whereby that which we now call vice might have been canonised for virtue; he might then have forbid any worship of him, love to him, fear of his name; he might then have commanded murders, thefts, adulteries. In the first, he would have united the link of duty from the creature, and dissolved the obligations of creatures to him, which is impossible to be conceived; for from the relation of a creature to God, obligations to God, and duties upon those obligations, do necessarily result. It had been against the rule of goodness and justice to have commanded the creature not to love him, and fear and obey him; this had been a command against righteousness, goodness, and intrinsic obligations to gratitude. And should murder, adulteries, rapines have been commanded instead of the contrary, God would have destroyed his own creation; he would have acted against the rule of goodness and order; he had been an unjust tyrannical governor of the world; public society would have been cracked in pieces, and the world become a shambles, a brothel house, a place below the common sentiments of a mere man. All sin therefore being against the law of God, the wisdom and holy rectitude of God's nature is denied in every act of disobedience. And what is the consequence of this, but that God is both foolish and unrighteous in commanding that which was neither an act of wisdom as a governor, nor an act of goodness as a benefactor to his creature?

As was said before, presumptuous sins are called reproaches of God: Num. xv. 30, 'The soul that doth aught presumptuously reproacheth the Lord.' Reproaches of men are either for natural, moral, or intellectual defects. All reproaches of God must imply a charge either of unrighteousness or ignorance; if of unrighteousness, it is a denial of his holiness; if of ignorance, it is a blemishing his wisdom. If God's laws were not wise and holy, God would not enjoin them; and if they are so, we deny infinite wisdom and holiness in God by not complying with them. As when a man believes not God when he promises, he 'makes him a liar,' 1 John v. 10, so he that obeys not a wise and holy God commanding, makes him guilty either of folly or unrighteousness.

Now, suppose you knew an absolute atheist, who denied the being of a God, yet had a life free from any notorious spot or defilement, would you in reason count him so bad as the other that owns a God in being, yet lays, by his course of action, such a black imputation of folly and impurity upon the God he professeth to own, an imputation which renders any man a most despicable creature?

Prop. 5. Sin in its own nature endeavours to render God the most miserable being. It is nothing but an opposition to the will of God. The will of no creature is so much contradicted as the will of God is by devils and men; and there is nothing under the heavens that the affections of human nature stand more point blank against, than against God. There is a slight of him in all the faculties of man; our souls are as unwilling to know him as our wills are averse to follow him: Rom. viii. 7, 'The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, nor can be subject.' It is true God's will cannot be hindered of its effect, for then God would not be supremely blessed, but unhappy and miserable; all misery ariseth from a want of that which a nature would have and ought to have; besides, if anything could frustrate God's will, it would be superior to him; God would not be omnipotent, and so would lose the perfection of the deity, and consequently the deity itself; for that which did wholly defeat God's will would be more powerful than he. But sin is a contradiction to the will of God's revelation; to the will of his precept, and therein doth naturally tend to a superiority over God, and would usurp his omnipotence, and deprive him of his blessedness. For if God had not an infinite power to turn the designs of it to his own glory, but the will of sin could prevail, God would be totally deprived of his blessedness. Doth not sin endeavour to subject God to the extravagant and contrary wills of men, and make him more a slave than any creature can be? For the will of no creature, not the meanest and most despicable creature, is so much crossed as the will of God is by sin: Isa. xliii. 24, 'Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins;' thou hast endeavoured to make a mere slave of me by sin. Sin endeavours to subject the blessed God to the humour and lust of every person in the world.

Prop. 6. Men sometimes in some circumstances do wish the not being of God. This some think to be the meaning of the text, 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God;' that is, he wishes there were no God. Many tamper with their own hearts to bring them to a persuasion that there is no God, and when they cannot do that, they conjure up wishes that there were none. Men naturally have some conscience of sin, and some notices of justice: Rom. i. 32, 'They know the judgment of God,' and they know the demerit of sin; they know the judgment of God, and 'that they which do such things are worthy of death.' What is the consequent of this but fear of punishment? and what is the issue of that fear but a wishing the judge either unwilling or unable to vindicate the honour of his violated law? When God is the object of such a wish, it is a virtual undeifying of him. Not to be able to punish, is to be impotent; not to be willing to punish, is to be unjust: imperfections inconsistent with the deity. God cannot be supposed without an infinite power to act, and an infinite righteousness as the rule of acting. Fear of God is natural to all men; not a fear of offending him, but a fear of being punished by him. The wishing the extinction of God has its degree in men, according to the degree of their fears of his just vengeance; and though such a wish be not in its meridian but in the damned in hell, yet it hath its starts and motions in affrighted and awakened consciences on the earth, under this rank of wishers, that there were no God, or that God were destroyed, do fall,—

1. Terrified consciences, that are *magor missabib*,* see nothing but matter of fear round about. As they have lived without the bounds of the law, they are afraid to fall under the stroke of his justice; fear wishes the destruction of that which it apprehends hurtful. It considers him as a God to whom 'vengeance belongs,' as the 'judge of all the earth,' Ps. xciv. 1, 2. The less hopes such a one hath of his pardon, the more joy he would have to hear that his judge should be stripped of his life; he would entertain with delight any reasons that might support him in the conceit that there were no God; in his present state, such a doctrine would be his security from an account; he would as much rejoice if there were no God to inflame a hell for him, as any guilty malefactor would if there were no judge to order a gibbet for him. Shame may bridle men's words, but the heart will be casting about for some arguments this way to secure itself. Such as are at any time in Spira's case, would be willing to cease to be creatures, that God might cease to be judge. 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no Elohim,' no judge, fancying God without any exercise of his judicial authority. And there is not any wicked man under anguish of spirit, but, were it within the reach of his power, would take away the life of God, and rid himself of his fears by destroying his avenger.

2. Debauched persons are not without such wishes sometimes. An obstinate servant wishes his master's death, from whom he expects correction for his debaucheries. As man stands in his corrupt nature, it is impossible but one time or other most debauched persons, at least have some kind of velleities, or imperfect wishes. It is as natural to men to abhor those things which are unsuitable and troublesome, as it is to please themselves in things agreeable to their minds and humours. And since man is so deeply in love with sin, as to count it the most estimable good, he cannot but wish the abolition of that law which checks it, and consequently the change of the lawgiver which enacted it; and in wishing a change in the holy nature of God, he wishes a destruction of God, who could not be God, if he ceased to be immutably holy. They do as certainly wish, that God had not a holy will to command them, as despairing souls wish, that God had not a righteous will to punish them; and to wish conscience extinct for the molestations they receive from it, is to wish the power conscience represents out of the world also.

Since the state of sinners is a state of distance from God, and the language of sinners to God is, 'Depart from us,' Job xxi. 14, they desire as little the continuance of his being as they desire the knowledge of his ways. The same reason which moves them to desire God's distance from them, would move them to desire God's not being. Since the greatest distance would be most agreeable to them, the destruction of God must be so too; because there is no greater distance from us, than in not being. Men would rather have God not to be, than themselves under control, that sensuality might range at pleasure. He is like a 'heifer sliding from the yoke,' Hosea iv. 16. The cursing of God in the heart, feared by Job of his children, intimates a wishing God despoiled of his authority, that their pleasure might not be damped by his law; besides, is there any natural man that sins against actuated knowledge, but either thinks or wishes that God might not see him, that God might not know his actions? And is not this to wish the destruction of God, who could not be God unless he were immense and omniscient?

3. Under this rank fall those who perform external duties only out of a principle of slavish fear. Many men perform those duties that the law enjoins, with the same sentiments that slaves perform their drudgery, and are

* That is, *מגור מסיב*, Jer. xx. 3.—Ed.

constrained in their duties by no other considerations but those of the whip and the cudgel. Since, therefore, they do it with reluctance, and secretly murmur while they seem to obey, they would be willing that both the commands were recalled, and the master that commands them were in another world. The Spirit of adoption makes men act towards God as a father, a Spirit of bondage only eyes him as a judge. Those that look upon their superiors as tyrannical, will not be much concerned in their welfare, and would be more glad to have their nails pared, than be under perpetual fear of them.

Many men regard not the infinite goodness in their service of him, but consider him as cruel, tyrannical, injurious to their liberty. Adam's posterity are not free from the sentiments of their common father, till they are regenerate. You know what conceit was the hammer whereby the hellish Jael struck the nail into our first parents, which conveyed death, together with the same imagination to all their posterity: Gen. iii. 5, 'God knows that in the day you eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' Alas, poor souls! God knew what he did when he forbade you that fruit; he was jealous you should be too happy; it was a cruelty in him to deprive you a food so pleasant and delicious. The apprehension of the severity of God's commands riseth up no less in desires that there were no God over us, than Adam's apprehension of envy in God, for the restraint of one tree moved him to attempt to be equal with God; fear is as powerful to produce the one in his posterity, as pride was to produce the other in the common root. When we apprehend a thing hurtful to us, we desire so much evil to it, as may render it incapable of doing us the hurt we fear. As we wish the preservation of what we love or hope for, so we are naturally apt to wish the not being of that whence we fear some hurt or trouble. We must not understand this as if any man did formally wish the destruction of God, as God. God in himself is an infinite mirror of goodness and ravishing loveliness. He is infinitely good, and so universally good, and nothing but good, and is therefore so agreeable to a creature, as a creature, that it is impossible that the creature, while it bears itself to God as a creature, should be guilty of this, but thirst after him and cherish every motion to him. As no man wishes the destruction of any creature, as a creature, but as it may conduce to something which he counts may be beneficial to himself, so no man doth, nor perhaps can wish the cessation of the being of God, as God; for then he must wish his own being to cease also; but as he considers him clothed with some perfections, which he apprehends as injurious to him; as his holiness in forbidding sin, his justice in punishing sin. And God being judged in those perfections contrary to what the revolted creature thinks convenient and good for himself, he may wish God stripped of those perfections, that thereby he may be free from all fear of trouble and grief from him in his fallen state. In wishing God deprived of those, he wishes God deprived of his being, because God cannot retain his deity without a love of righteousness and hatred of iniquity; and he could not testify his love to the one, or his loathing of the other, without encouraging goodness, and witnessing his anger against iniquity.

Let us now appeal to ourselves, and examine our own consciences. Did we never please ourselves sometimes in the thoughts, how happy we should be, how free in our vain pleasures, if there were no God? Have we not desired to be our own lords without control, subject to no law but our own, and be guided by no will but that of the flesh? Did we never rage against God under his afflicting hand? Did we never wish God stripped of his holy will to command, and his righteous will to punish, &c.

Thus much for the general.

For the proof of this, many considerations will bring in evidence ; most may be reduced to these two generals.

Man would set himself up, first, as his own rule ; secondly, as his own end and happiness.

I. Man would set himself up as his own rule instead of God. This will be evidenced in this method.

1. Man naturally disowns the rule God sets him.

2. He owns any other rule rather than that of God's prescribing.

3. These he doth in order to the setting himself up as his own rule.

4. He makes himself not only his own rule, but would make himself the rule of God, and give laws to his creator.

1. Man naturally disowns the rule God sets him. It is all one to deny his royalty and to deny his being. When we disown his authority, we disown his Godhead. It is the right of God to be the sovereign of his creatures ; and it must be a very loose and trivial assent that such men have to God's superiority over them (and consequently to the excellency of his being, upon which that authority is founded), who are scarce at ease in themselves, but when they are invading his rights, breaking his bands, casting away his cords, and contradicting his will.

Every man naturally is a son of Belial, would be without a yoke, and leap over God's enclosures ; and in breaking out against his sovereignty, we disown his being as God. For to be God and sovereign are inseparable ; he could not be God, if he were not supreme ; nor could he be a creator without being a lawgiver. To be God, and yet inferior to another, is a contradiction. To make rational creatures without prescribing them a law, is to make them without holiness, wisdom, and goodness.

(1.) There is in man naturally an unwillingness to have any acquaintance with the rule God sets him : Ps. xiv. 2, 'None that did understand and seek God.' The 'refusing instruction,' and 'casting his word behind the back,' is a part of atheism, Ps. l. 17. We are heavy in hearing the instructions either of law or gospel, Heb. v. 11, 12, and slow in the apprehension of what we hear. The people that God had hedged in from the wilderness of the world for his own garden were foolish, and did not know God ; were sottish, and had no understanding of him, Jer. iv. 22. The law of God is accounted a strange thing, Hos. viii. 12, a thing of a different climate and a far country from the heart of man, wherewith the mind of man had no natural acquaintance, and had no desire to have any, or they regarded it as a sordid thing. What God accounts great and valuable, they account mean and despicable. Men may shew a civility to a stranger, but scarce contract an intimacy ; there can be no amicable agreement between the holy will of God and the heart of a depraved creature : one is holy, the other unholy ; one is universally good, the other stark naught. The purity of the divine rule renders it nauseous to the impurity of a carnal heart. Water and fire may as well friendly kiss each other and live together without quarrelling and hissing, as the holy will of God and the unregenerate heart of a fallen creature.

The nauseating a holy rule is an evidence of atheism in the heart, as the nauseating wholesome food is of putrified phlegm in the stomach. It is found more or less in every Christian, in the remainders, though not in a full empire. As there is a law in his mind whereby he delights in the law of God, so there is a law in his members whereby he wars against the law of God, Rom. vii. 22, 23, 25. How predominant is this loathing of the law of God, when corrupt nature is in its full strength, without any principle to

control it! There is in the mind of such a one a darkness whereby it is ignorant of it, and in the will a depravedness whereby it is repugnant to it. If man were naturally willing and able to have an intimate acquaintance with, and delight in the law of God, it had not been such a signal favour for God to promise to write the law in the heart. A man may sooner engrave the chronicle of a whole nation, or all the records of God in the Scripture, upon the hardest marble with his bare finger, than write one syllable of the law of God in a spiritual manner upon his heart. For,

[1.] Men are negligent in using the means for the knowledge of God's will. All natural men are fools, who know not how to use the 'price God puts into their hands,' Prov. xvii. 16; they put not a due estimate upon opportunities and means of grace, and account that law folly which is the birth of an infinite and holy wisdom. The knowledge of God which they may glean from creatures, and is more pleasant to the natural gust of men, is not improved to the glory of God, if we will believe the indictment the apostle brings against the Gentiles, Rom. i. 21. And most of those that have dived into the depths of nature, have been more studious of the qualities of the creatures than of the excellency of the nature, or the discovery of the mind of God in them; who regard only the rising and motions of the star, but follow not with the wise men, its conduct to the king of the Jews. How often do we see men filled with an eager thirst for all other kind of knowledge, that cannot acquiesce in a twilight discovery, but are inquisitive into the causes and reasons of effects, yet are contented with a weak and languishing knowledge of God and his law, and are easily tired with the proposals of them.

He now that nauseates the means whereby he may come to know and obey God, has no intention to make the law of God his rule. There is no man that intends seriously an end, but he intends means in order to that end; as when a man intends the preservation or recovery of his health, he will intend means in order to those ends, otherwise he cannot be said to intend his health. So he that is not diligent in using means to know the mind of God, has no sound intention to make the will and law of God his rule. Is not the inquiry after the will of God made a work by the by, and fain to lacquey after other concerns of an inferior nature, if it hath any place at all in the soul? which is a despising the being of God. The notion of the sovereignty of God bears the same date with the notion of his Godhead; and by the same way that he reveals himself, he reveals his authority over us, whether it be by creatures without, or conscience within. All authority over rational creatures consists in commanding and directing; the duty of rational creatures, in compliance with that authority, consists in obeying. Where there is therefore a careless neglect of those means which convey the knowledge of God's will and our duty, there is an utter disowning of God as our sovereign and our rule.

[2.] When any part of the mind and will of God breaks in upon men, they endeavour to shake it off; as a man would a sergeant that comes to arrest him: 'They like not to retain God in their knowledge,' Rom. i. 28. 'A natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God;' that is, into his affection; he pusheth them back as men do troublesome and importunate beggars. They have no kindness to bestow upon it. They thrust with both shoulders against the truth of God, when it presseth in upon them; and dash as much contempt upon it as the Pharisees did upon the doctrine our Saviour directed against their covetousness. As men naturally delight to be without God in the world, so they delight to be without any offspring of God in their thoughts. Since the spiritual palate of man is depraved, divine

truth is unsavoury and ungrateful to us, till our taste and relish is restored by grace. Hence men damp and quench the motions of the Spirit to obedience and compliance with the dictates of God ; strip them of their life and vigour, and kill them in the womb. How unable are our memories to retain the substance of spiritual truth, but like sand in a glass, put in at one part and runs out at the other ! Have not many a secret wish that the Scripture had never mentioned some truths, or that they were blotted out of the Bible, because they face their consciences, and discourage those boiling lusts they would with eagerness and delight pursue ? Methinks that interruption John gives our Saviour, when he was upon the reproof of their pride, looks little better than a design to divert him from a discourse so much against the grain, by telling him a story of their prohibiting one to cast out devils, because he followed not them, Mark ix. 33, 38. How glad are men when they can raise a battery against a command of God, and raise some smart objection, whereby they may shelter themselves from the strictness of it !

[3.] When men cannot shake off the notices of the will and mind of God, they have no pleasure in the consideration of them ; which could not possibly be, if there were a real and fixed design to own the mind and law of God as our rule. Subjects or servants that love to obey their prince and master, will delight to read and execute their orders. The devils understand the law of God in their minds, but they loathe the impressions of it upon their wills. Those miserable spirits are bound in chains of darkness, evil habits in their wills, that they have not a thought of obeying that law they know. It was an unclean beast under the law that did not chew the cud ; it is a corrupt heart that doth not chew truth by meditation. A natural man is said not to know God, or the things of God ; he may know them notionally, but he knows them not affectionately. A sensual soul can have no delight in a spiritual law. To be sensual and not to have the Spirit are inseparable, Jude 19.

Natural men may indeed meditate upon the law and truth of God, but without delight in it ; if they take any pleasure in it, it is only as it is knowledge, not as it is a rule ; for we delight in nothing that we desire, but upon the same account that we desire it. Natural men desire to know God and some part of his will and law, not out of a sense of their practical excellency, but a natural thirst after knowledge ; and if they have a delight, it is in the act of knowing, not in the object known, not in the duties that stream from that knowledge ; they design the furnishing their understandings, not the quickening their affections ; like idle boys that strike fire, not to warm themselves by the heat, but sport themselves with the sparks ; whereas a gracious soul accounts not only his meditation, or the operations of his soul about God and his will to be sweet, but he hath a joy in the object of that meditation, Ps. civ. 34. Many have the knowledge of God, who have no delight in him or his will. Owls have eyes to perceive that there is a sun, but by reason of the weakness of their sight have no pleasure to look upon a beam of it ; so neither can a man by nature love or delight in the will of God, because of his natural corruption. That law that riseth up in men for conviction and instruction, they keep down under the power of corruption, making their souls not the sanctuary, but prison of truth, Rom. i. 18. They will keep it down in their hearts, if they cannot keep it out of their heads, and will not endeavour to know and taste the spirit of it.

[4.] There is further a rising and swelling of the heart against the will of God. (1.) Internal. God's law cast against a hard heart is like a ball thrown against a stone wall, by reason of the resistance rebounding the further from it. The meeting of a divine truth and the heart of man, is

like the meeting of two tides, the weaker swells and foams. We have a natural antipathy against a divine rule, and therefore when it is clapped close to our consciences, there is a snuffling at it, high reasonings against it, corruption breaks out more strongly; as water poured on lime sets it on fire by an *antiperistasis*, and the more water is cast upon it, the more furiously it burns; or as the sunbeams shining upon a dunghill makes the steams the thicker and the stench the noisomer, neither being the positive cause of the smoke in the lime, or the stench in the dunghill, but by accident the causes of the eruption: Rom. vii. 8, 'But sin taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence, for without the law sin was dead.' Sin was in a languishing posture, as if it were dead, like a lazy garrison in a city, till upon an alarm from the adversary it takes arms and revives its courage; all the sin in the heart gathers together its force to maintain its standing, like the vapours of the night, which unite themselves more closely to resist the beams of the rising sun. Deep conviction often provokes fierce opposition; sometimes disputes against a divine rule end in blasphemies: Acts xiii. 45, 'Contradicting and blaspheming' are coupled together. Men naturally desire things that are forbidden, and reject things commanded, from the corruption of nature, which affects an unbounded liberty, and is impatient of returning under that yoke it hath shaken off, and therefore rageth against the bars of the law, as the waves roar against the restraint of a bank. When the understanding is dark and the mind ignorant, sin lies as dead: 'A man scarce knows he hath such motions of concupiscence in him, he finds not the least breath of wind, but a full calm in his soul; but when he is awakened by the law, then the viciousness of nature being sensible of an invasion of its empire, arms itself against the divine law, and the more the command is urged, the more vigorously it bends its strength, and more insolently lifts up itself against it.*' He perceives more and more atheistical lusts than before; 'all manner of concupiscence,' more leprous and contagious than before. When there are any motions to turn to God, a reluctancy is presently perceived; atheistical thoughts bluster in the mind like the wind, they know not whence they come nor whither they go, so unapt is the heart to any acknowledgment of God as his ruler, and any reunion with him. Hence men are said to 'resist the Holy Ghost,' Acts vii. 51, to fall against it, as the word signifies, as a stone or any ponderous body falls against that which lies in its way; they would dash to pieces or grind to powder that very motion which is made for their instruction, and the Spirit too which makes it, and that not from a fit of passion, but an habitual repugnance. 'Ye always resist,' &c.

(2.) External, it is a fruit of atheism, in the fourth verse of this Psalm: 'Who eat up my people as they eat bread.' How do the revelations of the mind of God meet with opposition! And the carnal world like dogs bark against the shining of the moon! So much men hate the light, that they spurn at the lanterns that bear it; and because they cannot endure the treasure, often fling the earthen vessels against the ground wherein it is held. If the entrance of truth render the market worse for Diana's shrines, the whole city will be in an uproar, Acts xix. 24, 28, 29. When Socrates upon natural principles confuted the heathen idolatry, and asserted the unity of God, the whole cry of Athens, a learned university, is against him, and because he opposed the public received religion, though with an undoubted truth, he must end his life by violence. How hath every corner of the world steamed with the blood of those that would maintain the authority of

* Thes. Salmur. De Spiritu Servitutis, Thes. 12.

God in the world! The devil's children will follow the steps of their father, and endeavour to bruise the heel of divine truth, that would endeavour to break the head of corrupt lust.

[5.] Men often seem desirous to be acquainted with the will of God, not out of any respect to his will and to make it their rule, but upon some other consideration. Truth is scarce received as truth. There is more of hypocrisy than sincerity in the pale of the church, and attendance on the mind of God. The outward dowry of a religious profession makes it often more desirable than the beauty. Judas was a follower of Christ for the bag, not out of any affection to the divine revelation. Men sometimes pretend a desire to be acquainted with the will of God, to satisfy their own passions, rather than to conform to God's will. The religion of such is not the judgment of the man, but the passion of the brute. Many entertain a doctrine for the person's sake, rather than a person for the doctrine's sake. and believe a thing because it comes from a man they esteem, as if his lips were more canonical than Scripture.

The apostle implies in the commendation he gives the Thessalonians, 1 Thes. ii. 13, that some receive the word for human interest, not 'as it is in truth the word and will of God,' to command and govern their consciences by its sovereign authority; or else they 'have the truth of God' (as St James speaks of the faith of Christ) 'with respect of persons,' James ii. 1, and receive it not for the sake of the fountain, but of the channel; so that many times the same truth delivered by another is disregarded, which when dropping from the fancy and mouth of a man's own idol, is cried up as an oracle. This is to make not God, but man, the rule; for though we entertain that which materially is the truth of God, yet not formally as his truth, but as conveyed by one we affect; and that we receive a truth and not an error, we owe the obligation to the honesty of the instrument, and not to the strength and clearness of our own judgment. Wrong considerations may give admittance to an unclean as well as a clean beast into the ark of the soul; that which is contrary to the mind of God may be entertained as well as that which is agreeable. It is all one to such, that have no respect to God, what they have; as it is all one to a sponge to suck up the foulest water or the sweetest wine, when either is applied to it.

[6.] Many that entertain the notions of the will and mind of God admit them with unsettled and wavering affections. There is a great levity in the heart of man. The Jews that one day applaud our Saviour with *Hosannahs* as their king, vote his crucifixion the next, and use him as a murderer. We begin in the Spirit and end in the flesh. Our hearts, like lute-strings, are changed with every change of weather, with every appearance of a temptation; scarce one motion of God in a thousand prevails with us for a settled abode. It is a hard task to make a signature of those truths upon our affections, which will with ease pass current with our understandings; our affections will as soon loose them as our understandings embrace them. The heart of man is unstable as water, Gen. xlix. 4, James i. 8. Some were willing to rejoice in John's light, which reflected a lustre on their minds, but not in his heat, which would have conveyed a warmth to their hearts; and the light was pleasing to them but for a season, John v. 35, while their corruptions lay as if they were dead, not when they were awakened. Truth may be admitted one day, and the next day rejected. As Austin saith of a wicked man, he loves the truth shining, but he hates the truth reproving. This is not to make God, but our own humour, our rule and measure.

[7.] Many desire an acquaintance with the law and truth of God, with a design to improve some lust by it, to turn the word of God to be a pander

to the breach of his law. This is so far from making God's will our rule, that we make our own vile affections the rule of his law. How many forced interpretations of Scripture have been coined to give consent to the lusts of men, and the divine rule forced to bend and be squared to men's loose and carnal apprehensions! It is a part of the instability or falseness of the heart to 'wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction,' 2 Peter iii. 16, which they could not do, if they did not first wring them to countenance some detestable error or filthy crime. In paradise, the first interpretation made of the first law of God was point blank against the mind of the law-giver, and venomous to the whole race of mankind. Paul himself feared that some might put his doctrine of grace to so ill a use, as to be an altar and sanctuary to shelter their presumption: Rom. vi. 1, 15, 'Shall we then continue in sin, that grace may abound?' Poisonous consequences are often drawn from the sweetest truths; as when God's patience is made a topic whence to argue against his providence, Ps. xciv. 1, or an encouragement to commit evil more greedily, as though because he had not presently a revenging hand, he had not an all-seeing eye; or when the doctrine of justification by faith is made use of to depress a holy life; or God's readiness to receive returning sinners an encouragement to defer repentance till a death-bed. A liar will hunt for shelter in the reward God gave the midwives that lied to Pharaoh for the preservation of the males of Israel, and Rahab's saving the spies by false intelligence. God knows how to distinguish between grace and corruption, that they may lie close together, or between something of moral goodness and moral evil which may be mixed. We find their fidelity rewarded, which was a moral good; but not their lie approved, which was a moral evil. Nor will Christ's conversing with sinners be a plea for any to thrust themselves into evil company. Christ conversed with sinners as a physician with diseased persons, to cure them, not approve them; others with profligate persons to receive infection from them, not to communicate holiness to them. Satan's children have studied their father's art, who wanted not perverted Scripture to second his temptations against our Saviour, Mat. iv. 4, 6. How often do carnal hearts turn divine revelation to carnal ends, as the sea fresh water into salt! As men subject the precepts of God to carnal interests, so they subject the truths of God to carnal fancies. When men will allegorise the word, and make a humorous and crazy fancy the interpreter of divine oracles, and not the Spirit speaking in the word, this is to enthrone our own imaginations as the rule of God's law, and depose his law from being the rule of our reason; this is to rifle truth of its true mind and intent. It is more to rob a man of his reason, the essential constitutive part of man, than of his estate. This is to refuse an intimate acquaintance with his will. We shall never tell what is the matter of a precept, or the matter of a promise, if we impose a sense upon it contrary to the plain meaning of it; thereby we shall make the law of God to have a distinct sense according to the variety of men's imaginations, and so make every man's fancy a law to himself.

Now, that this unwillingness to have a spiritual acquaintance with divine truth is a disowning God as our rule, and a setting up self in his stead, is evident, because this unwillingness respects truth,

First, As it is most spiritual and holy. A fleshly mind is most contrary to a spiritual law, and particularly as it is a searching and discovering law, that would dethrone all other rules in the soul. As men love to be without a holy God in the world, so they love to be without a holy law, the transcript and image of God's holiness, in their hearts, and without holy men, the lights

kindled by the Father of lights. As the holiness of God, so the holiness of the law most offends a carnal heart : Isa. xxx. 11, 'Cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us ; prophesy [not] to us right things.' They could not endure God as a holy one. Herein God places their rebellion, rejecting him as their rule : ver. 9, 'Rebellious children, that will not hear the law of the Lord.' The more pure and precious any discovery of God is, the more it is disrelished by the world. As spiritual sins are sweetest to a carnal heart, so spiritual truths are most distasteful. The more of the brightness of the sun any beam conveys, the more offensive it is to a distempered eye.

Secondly, As it doth most relate to, or lead to God. The devil directs his fiercest batteries against those doctrines in the word, and those graces in the heart, which most exalt God, debase man, and bring men to the lowest subjection to their Creator. Such is the doctrine and grace of justifying faith. That men hate not knowledge as knowledge, but as it directs them to choose the fear of the Lord, was the determination of the Holy Ghost long ago : Prov. i. 29, 'For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord.' Whatsoever respects God, clears up guilt, witnesses man's revolt to him, rouseth up conscience, and moves to a return to God, a man naturally runs from, as Adam did from God, and seeks a shelter in some weak bushes of error, rather than appear before it. Not that men are unwilling to inquire into and contemplate some divine truths which lie furthest from the heart, and concern not themselves immediately with the rectifying the soul. They may view them with such a pleasure as some might take in beholding the miracles of our Saviour, who could not endure his searching doctrine. The light of speculation may be pleasant, but the light of conviction is grievous, that which galls their consciences, and would affect them with a sense of their duty to God.

Is it not easy to perceive that when a man begins to be serious in the concerns of the honour of God and the duty of his soul, he feels a reluctancy within him, even against the pleas of conscience, which evidenceth that some unworthy principle has got footing in the hearts of men, which fights against the declarations of God without and the impressions of the law of God within, at the same time when a man's own conscience takes part with it, which is the substance of the apostle's discourse, Rom. vii. 15, 16, &c.

Close discourses of the honour of God and our duty to him are irksome, when men are upon a merry pin. They are like a damp in a mine, that takes away their breath ; they shuffle them out as soon as they can, and are as unwilling to retain the speech of them in their mouths, as the knowledge of them in their hearts. Gracious speeches, instead of bettering many men, distemper them, as sometimes sweet perfumes affect a weak head with aches.

Thirdly, As it is most contrary to self. Men are unwilling to acquaint themselves with any truth that leads to God, because it leads from self. Every part of the will of God is more or less displeasing, as it sounds harsh against some carnal interest men would set above God, or as a mate with him. Man cannot desire any intimacy with that law which he regards as a bird of prey, to pick out his right eye or gnaw off his right hand, his lust dearer than himself. The reason we have such hard thoughts of God's will, is because we have such high thoughts of ourselves. It is a hard matter to believe or will that which hath no affinity with some principle in the understanding, and no interest in our will and passions. Our unwillingness to be acquainted with the will of God, ariseth from the disproportion between that and our corrupt hearts ; we are 'alienated from the life of God in our minds,' Eph. iv. 18, 19. As we live not like God, so we neither think or will as God.

There is an antipathy in the heart of man against that doctrine which teaches us to deny ourselves, and be under the rule of another ; but whatsoever favours the ambition, lusts, and profits of men is easily entertainable. Many are fond of those sciences which may enrich their understandings, and grate not upon their sensual delights. Many have an admirable dexterity in finding out philosophical reasons, mathematical demonstrations, or raising observations upon the records of history, and spend much time and many serious and affectionate thoughts in the study of them. In those they have not immediately to do with God ; their beloved pleasures are not impaired. It is a satisfaction to self, without the exercise of any hostility against it. But had those sciences been against self, as much as the law and will of God, they had long since been rooted out of the world. Why did the young man turn his back upon the law of Christ ? Because of his worldly self. Why did the Pharisees mock at the doctrine of our Saviour, and not at their own traditions ? Because of covetous self. Why did the Jews slight the person of our Saviour, and put him to death, after the reading so many credentials of his being sent from heaven ? Because of ambitious self, that the Romans might not come and take away their kingdom. If the law of God were fitted to the humours of self, it would be readily and cordially observed by all men. Self is the measure of a world of seeming religious actions ; while God seems to be the object and his law the motive, self is the rule and end : Zech. vii. 5, 'Did you fast unto me ?' &c.

(2.) As men discover their disowning the will of God as a rule by unwillingness to be acquainted with it, so they discover it by the contempt of it, after they cannot avoid the notions and some impressions of it. The rule of God is burdensome to a sinner ; he flies from it as from a frightful bugbear and unpleasant yoke. Sin against the knowledge of the law is therefore called a 'going back from the commandment of God's lips,' Job xxiii. 12 ; a 'casting God's word behind them,' Ps. l. 17, as a contemptible thing, fitter to be trodden in the dirt than lodged in the heart. Nay, it is a casting it off as an abominable thing, for so the word נִסְתָּ signifies : Hos. viii. 3, 'Israel hath cast off the thing that is good ;' an utter refusal of God : Jer. xlv. 16, 'As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken.' In the slight of his precepts, his essential perfections are slighted. In disowning his will as a rule, we disown all those attributes which flow from his will, as goodness, righteousness, and truth. As an act of the divine understanding is supposed to precede the act of the divine will, so we slight the infinite reason of God. Every law, though it proceeds from the will of the lawgiver, and doth formally consist in an act of the will, yet it doth presuppose an act of the understanding. If 'the commandment be holy, just, and good,' as it is (Rom. vii. 12), if it be the image of God's holiness, a transcript of his righteousness and the efflux of his goodness, then in every breach of it, dirt is cast upon those attributes which shine in it, and a slight of all the regards he hath to his own honour, and all the provisions he makes for his creature. This atheism or contempt of God, is more taken notice of by God than the matter of the sin itself ; as a respect to God, in a weak and imperfect obedience, is more than the matter of the obedience itself, because it is an acknowledgment of God, so a contempt of God, in an act of disobedience, is more than the matter of disobedience. The creature stands, in such an act, not only in a posture of distance from God, but defiance of him. It was not the bare act of murder and adultery which Nathan charged upon David, but the atheistical principle which spirited those evil acts. The 'despising the commandment of the Lord' was the venom of them, 2 Sam. xii. 9, 10. It is possible to break a law without contempt ; but when men

pretend to believe there is a God, and that this is the law of God, it shews a contempt of his majesty. Men naturally account God's laws too strict, his yoke too heavy, and his limits too strait; and he that liveth in a contempt of this law, curseth God in his life. How can they believe there is a God, who despise him as a ruler? How can they believe him to be a guide, that disdain to follow him? To think we firmly believe a God, without living conformable to his law, is an idle and vain imagination. The true and sensible motion* of a God cannot subsist with disorder and an affected unrighteousness.

This contempt is seen,

[1.] In any presumptuous breach of any part of his law. Such sins are frequently called in Scripture rebellions, which are a denial of the allegiance we owe to him. By a wilful refusal of his right in one part, we root up the foundation of that rule he doth justly challenge over us. His right is as extensive to command us in one thing as in another. And if it be disowned in one thing, it is virtually disowned in all, and the whole statute-book of God is contemned: James ii. 10, 11, 'Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, is guilty of all.' A willing breaking one part, though there be a willing observance of all the other points of it, is a breach of the whole, because the authority of God, which gives sanction to the whole, is slighted. The obedience to the rest is dissembled; for the love which is the root of all obedience is wanting, for 'love is the fulfilling the whole law,' Rom. xiii. 10. The rest are obeyed because they cross not carnal desire so much as the other, and so it is an observance of himself, not of God. Besides, the authority of God, which is not prevalent to restrain us from the breach of one point, would be of as little force with us to restrain us from the breach of all the rest, did the allurements of the flesh give us as strong a diversion from the one as from the other. And though the command that is transgressed be the least in the whole law, yet the authority which enjoins it is the same with that which enacts the greatest. And it is not so much the matter of the command, as the authority commanding, which lays the obligation.

[2.] In the natural averseness to the declarations of God's will and mind, which way soever they tend. Since man affected to be as God, he desires to be boundless; he would not have fetters, though they be golden ones, and conduce to his happiness; though the law of God be a strength to them, yet they will not: Isa. xxx. 15, 'In returning shall be your strength; and you would not.' They would not have a bridle to restrain them from running into the pit, nor be hedged in by the law, though for their security, as if they thought it too slavish and low-spirited a thing to be guided by the will of another. Hence man is compared to a wild ass, that loves to 'snuff up the wind in the wilderness at her pleasure,' rather than come under the guidance of God, Jer. ii. 24. From whatsoever quarter of the heavens you pursue her, she will run to the other.

The Israelites could not endure what was commanded, Heb. xii. 20, though in regard of the moral part, agreeable to what they found written in their own nature, and to the observance whereof they had the highest obligations of any people under heaven, since God had by many prodigies delivered them from a cruel slavery, the memory of which prefaced the Decalogue: Exod. xx. 2, 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' They could not think of the rule of their duty but they must reflect upon the grand incentive of it in their redemption from Egyptian thralldom; yet this people were

* Qu. 'notion'?—ED.

cross to God, which way soever he moved. When they were in the brick-kilns, they cried for deliverance; when they had heavenly manna, they longed for their onions and garlic. In Num. xiv. 8, they repent of their deliverance from Egypt, and talk of returning again to seek the remedy of their evils in the hands of their cruellest enemies; and would rather put themselves into the irons whence God had delivered them, than believe one word of the promise of God for giving them a fruitful land. But when Moses tells them God's order, that they should turn back by the way of the Red Sea, ver. 25, and that God had confirmed it by an oath that they should not see the land of Canaan, ver. 28, they then run cross to this command of God, and instead of marching towards the Red Sea, which they had wished for before, they will go up to Canaan, as in spite of God and his threatening, 'We will go to the place which the Lord hath promised,' ver. 40, which Moses calls a 'transgressing the commandments of the Lord,' ver. 41. They would presume to go up, notwithstanding Moses his prohibition, and are smitten by the Amalekites. When God gives them a precept, with a promise to go up to Canaan, they long for Egypt; when God commands them to return to the Red Sea, which was nearer to the place they longed for, they will shift sides and go up to Canaan, Num. xxi. 4, 5, &c.;* and when they found they were to traverse the solitudes of the desert, they took pet against God, and instead of thanking him for the late victory against the Canaanites, they reproach him for his conduct from Egypt, and the manna wherewith he nourished them in the wilderness. They would not go to Canaan the way God had chosen, nor preserve themselves by the means God had ordained. They would not be at God's disposal, but complain of the badness of the way and the lightness of manna, empty of any necessary juice to sustain their nature. They murmuringly solicit the will and power of God to change all that order which he had resolved in his counsel, and take another, conformable to their vain, foolish desires. And they signified thereby that they would invade his conduct, and that he should act according to their fancy, which the psalmist calls a 'tempting of God, and limiting the Holy One of Israel,' Ps. lxxviii. 41.

To what point soever the declarations of God stand, the will of man turns the quite contrary way. Is not the carriage of this nation, the best then in the world, a discovery of the depth of our natural corruption, how cross man is to God? And that charge God brings against them may be brought against all men by nature, that they 'despise his judgment,' and have a rooted abhorrency of his statutes in their soul, Lev. xxvi. 43. No sooner had they recovered from one rebellion, but they revolted to another; so difficult a thing it is for man's nature to be rendered capable of conforming to the will of God. The carriage of his people is but a copy of the nature of mankind, and is 'written for our admonition,' 1 Cor. x. 11. From this temper men are said to 'make void the law of God,' Ps. cxix. 126; to make it of no obligation, an antiquated and moth-eaten record. And the Pharisees, by setting up their traditions against the will of God, are said to make his law 'of none effect,' to strip it of all its authority, as the word signifies, Mat. xv. 6, ἡκυρώσατε.

[3.] We have the greatest slight of that will of God which is most for his honour and his greatest pleasure. It is the nature of man, ever since Adam, to do so: Hosea vi. 6, 7, 'God desired mercy, and not sacrifice; the knowledge of himself more than burnt-offering. But they, like men,' as Adam, 'have transgressed the covenant,' invade God's rights, and not let him be Lord of one tree.

* Daille, Sermon. 1 Cor. x. Sermon. 9.

We are more curious observers of the fringes of the law than of the greater concerns of it. The Jews were diligent in sacrifices and offerings, which God did not urge upon them as principals, but as types of other things, but negligent of the faith which was to be established by him; holiness, mercy, pity, which concerned the honour of God as governor of the world, and were imitations of the holiness and goodness of God, they were strangers to. This is God's complaint, Isa. i. 11, 12, and 16, 17.

We shall find our hearts most averse to the observation of those laws which are eternal and essential to righteousness; such that he could not but command, as he is a righteous governor; in the observation of which we come nearest to him, and express his image more clearly, as those laws for an inward and spiritual worship, a supreme affection to him. God, in regard of his righteousness and holiness of his nature, and the excellency of his being, could not command the contrary to these; but this part of his will our hearts most swell against, our corruption doth most snarl at, whereas those laws which are only positive, and have no intrinsic righteousness in them, but depend purely upon the will of the lawgiver, and may be changed at his pleasure (which the other, that have an intrinsic righteousness in them, cannot), we better comply with than that part of his will that doth express more of the righteousness of his nature, Ps. l. 6, 17, 19, such as the ceremonial part of worship, and the ceremonial law among the Jews. We are more willing to observe order in some outward attendances and glavering devotions, than discard secret affections to evil, crucify inward lusts and delightful thoughts. A 'hanging down the head like a bulrush' is not difficult, but the breaking the heart like a potter's vessel to shreds and dust (a sacrifice God delights in, whereby the excellency of God and the vileness of the creature is owned), goes against the grain. To cut off an outward branch is not so hard as to hack at the root. What God most loathes, as most contrary to his will, we most love. No sin did God so severely hate, and no sin were the Jews more inclined unto, than that of idolatry. The heathen had not 'changed their God' as the Jews had 'changed their glory,' Jer. ii. 11; and all men are naturally tainted with this sin, which is so contrary to the holy and excellent nature of God. By how much the more defect there is of purity in our respects to God, by so much the more respect there is to some idol within or without us, to humour, custom, and interest, &c.

Never did any law of God meet with so much opposition as Christianity, which was the design of God from the first promise to the exhibiting the Redeemer, and from thence to the end of the world. All people drew swords at first against it. The Romans prepared yokes for their neighbours, but provided temples for the idols those people worshipped. But Christianity, the choicest design and most delightful part of the will of God, never met with a kind entertainment at first in any place. Rome, that entertained all others, persecuted this with fire and sword, though sealed by greater testimonies from heaven than their own records could report in favour of their idols.

[4.] In running the greatest hazards, and exposing ourselves to more trouble to cross the will of God, than is necessary to the observance of it. It is a vain charge men bring against the divine precepts, that they are rigorous, severe, difficult, when, besides the contradiction to our Saviour, who tells us his yoke is easy and his burden light, they thwart their own calm reason and judgment. Is there not more difficulty to be vicious, covetous, violent, cruel, than to be virtuous, charitable, kind? Doth the will of God enjoin that that is not conformable to right reason and secretly

delightful in the exercise and issue? And, on the contrary, what doth Satan and the world engage us in that is not full of molestation and hazard? Is it a sweet and comely thing to combat continually against our own consciences, and resist our own light, and commence a perpetual quarrel against ourselves, as we ordinarily do when we sin? They, in the prophet, Micah vi. 6, 7, 8, would be at the expense of 'thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil,' if they could compass them; yea, would strip themselves of their natural affection to their first-born to expiate the 'sin of their soul,' rather than to 'do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God;' things more conducive to the honour of God, the welfare of the world, the security of their souls, and of a more easy practice than the offerings they wished for.

Do not men then disown God, when they will walk in ways hedged with thorns, wherein they meet with the arrows of conscience at every turn in their sides, and slide down to an everlasting punishment, sink under an intolerable slavery, to contradict the will of God? When they will prefer a sensual satisfaction, with a combustion in their consciences, violation of their reasons, gnawing cares and weary travels, before the honour of God, the dignity of their natures, the happiness of peace and health, which might be preserved at a cheaper rate than they are at to destroy them?

[5.] In the unwillingness and awkwardness of the heart, when it is to pay God a service. Men 'do evil with both hands earnestly,' Micah vii. 3, but do good with one hand faintly; no life in the heart nor any diligence in the hand. What slight and loose thoughts of God doth this unwillingness imply! It is a wrong to his providence, as though we were not under his government, and had no need of his assistance; a wrong to his excellency, as though there were no amiableness in him to make his service desirable; an injury to his goodness and power, as if he were not able or willing to reward the creature's obedience, or careless, not to take notice of it. It is a sign we receive little satisfaction in him, and that there is a great unsuitableness between him and us.

First, There is a kind of constraint in the first engagement. We are rather pressed to it than enter ourselves volunteers. What we call service to God, is done, naturally, much against our wills; it is not a delightful food, but a bitter potion; we are rather haled than run to it. There is a contradiction of sin within us against our service, as there was a contradiction of sinners without our Saviour against his doing the will of God. Our hearts are unwieldy to any spiritual service of God; we are fain to use a violence with them sometimes. Hezekiah, it is said, 'walked before the Lord with a perfect heart,' 2 Kings xx. 3; he walked, he made himself to walk. Man naturally cares not for a walk with God; if he hath any communion with him, it is with such a dulness and heaviness of spirit, as if he wished himself out of his company. Man's nature, being contrary to holiness, hath an aversion to any act of homage to God, because holiness must at least be pretended; in every duty wherein we have a communion with God, holiness is requisite; now, as men are against the truth of holiness because it is unsuitable to them, so they are not friends to those duties which require it, and for some space divert them from the thoughts of their beloved lusts. The word of the Lord is a yoke, prayer a drudgery, obedience a strange element. We are like fish, that 'drink up iniquity like water,' Job xv. 16, and come not to the bank without the force of an angle; no more willing to do service for God than a fish is of itself to do service for man. It is a constrained act to satisfy conscience, and such are servile, not son-like performances, and spring from bondage more than affection; if

conscience, like a task-master, did not scourge them to duty, they would never perform it.

Let us appeal to ourselves whether we are not more unwilling to secret, closet, hearty duty to God, than to join with others in some external service ; as if those inward services were a going to the rack, and rather our penance than privilege. How much service hath God in the world from the same principle that vagrants perform their task in Bridewell ! How glad are many of evasions to back them in the neglect of the commands of God, of corrupt reasonings from the flesh to waylay an act of obedience, and a multitude of excuses to blunt the edge of the precept ! The very service of God shall be a pretence to deprive him of the obedience due to him. Saul will not be ruled by God's will in the destroying the cattle of the Amalekites, but by his own ; and will impose upon the will and wisdom of God, judging God mistaken in his command, and that the cattle God thought fittest to be meat to the fowls were fitter to be sacrifices on the altar, 1 Sam. xv. 3, 9, 15, 21.

If we do perform any part of his will, is it not for our own ends, to have some deliverance from trouble ? Isa. xxvi. 16, ' In trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer, when thy chastening was upon them.' In affliction, he shall find them kneeling in homage and devotion ; in prosperity, he shall feel them kicking with contempt ; they can pour out a prayer in distress, and scarce drop one when they are delivered.

Secondly, There is a slighness in our service of God. We are loath to come into his presence, and when we do come, we are loath to continue with him. We pay not an homage to him heartily, as to our lord and governor ; we regard him not as our master, whose work we ought to do, and whose honour we ought to aim at.

First, In regard of the matter of service. When the torn, the lame, and the sick is offered to God, Mal. i. 13, 14, so thin and lean a sacrifice that you might have thrown it to the ground with a puff, so some understand the meaning of ' you have snuffed at it.' Men have naturally such slight thoughts of the majesty and law of God that they think any service is good enough for him, and conformable to his law. The dullest and deadest times we think fittest to pay God a service in ; when sleep is ready to close our eyes, and we are unfit to serve ourselves, we think it a fit time to open our hearts to God. How few *morning sacrifices* hath God from many persons and families ! Men leap out of their beds to their carnal pleasures or worldly employments, without any thought of their Creator and Preserver, or any reflection upon his will as the rule of our daily obedience ; and as many reserve the dregs of their lives, their old age, to offer up their souls to God, so they reserve the dregs of the day, their sleeping time, for the offering up their service to him. How many grudge to spend their best time in the serving the will of God, and reserve for him the sickly and rheumatic part of their lives ; the remainder of that which the devil and their own lusts have fed upon !

Would not any prince or governor judge a present half eaten up by wild beasts, or that which died in a ditch, a contempt of his royalty ? A corrupt thing is too base and vile for so great a king as God is, whose name is dreadful, Mal. i. 14. When by age men are weary of their own bodies, they would present them to God, yet grudgingly, as if a tired body were too good for him, snuffing at the command for service. God calls for our best, and we give him the worst.

Secondly, In respect of frame. We think any frame will serve God's turn ; which speaks our slight of God as a ruler. Man naturally performs duty with an unholy heart, whereby it becomes an abomination to God :

Prov. xxviii. 9, 'He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayers shall be an abomination to God.' The services which he commands he hates for their evil frames or corrupt ends: Amos v. 21, 'I hate, I despise your feast-days, I will not smell in your solemn assemblies.' God requires gracious services, and we give him corrupt ones. We do not rouse up our hearts, as David called upon his lute and harp to awake, Ps. lvii. 8. Our hearts are not given to him, we put him off with bodily exercise; the heart is but ice to what it doth not affect. There is not that natural vigour in the observance of God which we have in worldly business. When we see a liveliness in men in other things, change the scene into a notion towards God, how suddenly doth their vigour shrink, and their hearts freeze into sluggishness! Many times we serve God as languishingly as if we were afraid he should accept us, and pray as coldly as if we were unwilling he should hear us, and take away that lust by which we are governed, and which conscience forces us to pray against; as if we were afraid God should set up his own throne and government in our hearts. How fleeting are we in divine meditation, how sleepy in spiritual exercises, but in other exercises active! The soul doth not awaken itself, and excite those animal and vital spirits which it will in bodily recreations and sports, much less the powers of the soul; whereby it is evident we prefer the latter before any service to God. Since there is a fulness of animal spirits, why might they not be excited in holy duties as well as in other operations, but that there is a reluctancy in the soul to exercise its supremacy in this case, and perform anything becoming a creature in subjection to God as a ruler?

It is evident also in the distractions we have in his service. How loath are we to serve God fixedly one hour, nay, a part of an hour, notwithstanding all the thoughts of his majesty, and the eternity of glory set before our eye! What man is there since the fall of Adam that served God one hour without many wanderings and unsuitable thoughts unfit for that service! How ready are our hearts to start out and unite themselves with any worldly objects that please us!

Weariness in it evidenceth it. To be weary of our dulness signifies a desire; to be weary of service signifies a discontent to be ruled by God. How tired are we in the performance of spiritual duties, when in the vain triflings of time we have a perpetual motion. How will many willingly revel whole nights, when their hearts will flag at the threshold of a religious service; like Dagon, 1 Sam. v. 4, lose both our heads to think, and hands to act, when the ark of God is present. Some in the prophet wished the new moon and the Sabbath over, that they might sell their corn, and be busied again in their worldly affairs, Amos viii. 5. A slight and weariness of the Sabbath was a slight of the Lord of the Sabbath, and of that freedom from the yoke and rule of sin which was signified by it. The design of the sacrifices in the new moon was to signify a rest from the tyranny of sin, and a consecration to the spiritual service of God. Servants that are quickly weary of their work are weary of the authority of their master that enjoins it. If our hearts had a value for God, it would be with us as with the needle to the loadstone, there would be upon his beck a speedy motion to him, and a fixed union with him. When the judgments and affections of the saints shall be fully refined in glory, they shall be willing to behold the face of God, and be under his government to eternity, without any weariness; as the holy angels have owned God as their sovereign near these six thousand years without being weary of running on his errands. But, alas! while the flesh clogs us, there will be some relics of unwillingness to hear his injunctions, and weariness in performing them; though men may excuse

those things by extrinsic causes, yet God's unerring judgment calls it a weariness of himself: Isa. xliii. 22, 'Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.' Of this he taxeth his own people, when he tells them he would have 'the beasts of the field, the dragons, and the owls;' the Gentiles, that the Jews counted no better than such, to honour him, and acknowledge him their rule in a way of duty, ver. 20, 21.

[6.] This contempt is seen in a deserting the rule of God, when our expectations are not answered upon our service. When services are performed from carnal principles, they are soon cast off when carnal ends meet not with desired satisfaction. But when we own ourselves God's servants, and God our master, 'our eyes will wait upon him till he have mercy on us,' Ps. cxliii. 2. It is one part of the duty we owe to God as our master in heaven to 'continue in prayer,' Col. iv. 1, 2. And by the same reason in all other service, and to 'watch in the same with thanksgiving;' to watch for occasions of praise, to watch with cheerfulness for further manifestations of his will, strength to perform it, success in the performance, that we may from all draw matter of praise. As we are in a posture of obedience to his precepts, so we should be in a posture of waiting for the blessing of it.

But naturally we reject the duty we owe to God if he do not speed the blessing we expect from him. How many do secretly mutter the same as they in Job xxi. 15, 'What is the Almighty that we should serve him, and what profit shall we have if we pray to him?' They serve not God out of conscience to his commands, but for some carnal profit; and if God make them to wait for it, they will not stay his leisure, but cease soliciting him any longer. Two things are expressed; that God was not worthy of any homage from them,—'What is the Almighty that we should serve him?'—and that the service of him would not bring in a good revenue or an advantage of that kind they expected. Interest drives many men on to some kind of service, and when they do not find an advance of that, they will acknowledge God no more; but like some beggars, if you give them not upon their asking and calling you good master, from blessing they will turn to cursing.

How often do men do that secretly, practically if not plainly, which Job's wife advised him to, curse God, and cast off that disguise of integrity they had assumed! Job ii. 9, 'Dost thou still retain thy integrity? Curse God.' What a stir, and pulling, and crying is here! Cast off all thoughts of religious service, and be at daggers drawing with that God, who for all thy service of him has made thee so wretched a spectacle to men, and a banquet for worms. The like temper is decipered in the Jews: Mal. iii. 14, 'It is in vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, that we have walked mournfully before the Lord?' What profit is it that we have regarded his statutes, and carried ourselves in a way of subjection to God as our sovereign, when we inherit nothing but sorrow, and the idolatrous neighbours swim in all kind of pleasures? As if it were the most miserable thing to acknowledge God. If men have not the benefits they expect, they think God unrighteous in himself, and injurious to them, in not conferring the favour they imagine they have merited; and if they have not that recompence, they will deny God that subjection they owe to him as creatures. Grace moves to God upon a sense of duty, corrupt nature upon a sense of interest; sincerity is encouraged by gracious returns, but is not melted away by God's delay or refusal. Corrupt nature would have God at its beck, and steers a course of duty by hope of some carnal profits, not by a sense of the sovereignty of God.

[7.] This contempt is seen in breaking promises with God. One while the conscience of a man makes vows of new obedience, and perhaps binds himself with many an oath; but they prove like Jonah's gourd, withering the next day after their birth. This was Pharaoh's temper; under a storm he would submit to God, and let Israel go, but when the storm is ended, he will not be under God's control, and Israel's slavery shall be increased. The fear of divine wrath makes many a sinner turn his back upon his sin, and the love of his ruling lust makes him turn his back upon his true Lord. This is from the prevalency of sin, that disputes with God for the sovereignty.*

When God hath sent a sharp disease, as a messenger to bind men to their beds, and make an interruption of their sinful pleasures, their mouths are full of promises of a new life, in hope to escape the just vengeance of God. The sense of hell, which strikes strongly upon them, makes them full of such pretended resolutions when they howl upon their beds. But if God be pleased in his patience to give them a respite, to take off the chains where-with he seemed to be binding them for destruction, and recruit their strength, they are more earnest in their sins than they were in their promises of a reformation, as if they had got the mastery of God, and had outwitted him. How often doth God charge them of not returning to him after a succession of judgments! Amos iv. 6-11. So hard it is, not only to allure, but to scourge men to an acknowledgment of God as their ruler.

Consider, then,

Are we not naturally inclined to disobey the known will of God? Can we say, Lord, for thy sake we refrain the thing to which our hearts incline? Do we not allow ourselves to be licentious, earthly, vain, proud, revengeful, though we know it will offend him? Have we not been peevishly cross to his declared will? Run counter to him and those laws which express most of the glory of his holiness? Is not this to disown him as our rule? Did we never wish there were no law to bind us, no precept to check our idols? What is this, but to wish that God would depose himself from being our governor, and leave us to our own conduct? or else to wish that he were as unholy as ourselves, as careless of his own laws as we are; that is, that he were no more a God than we, a God as sinful and unrighteous as ourselves? He whose heart riseth against the law of God to unlaw it, riseth against the author of that law to undeify him. He that casts contempt upon the dearest thing God hath in the world, that which is the image of his holiness, the delight of his soul; that which he hath given a special charge to maintain, and that because it is holy, just, and good; would not stick to rejoice at the destruction of God himself. If God's holiness and righteousness in the beam† be despised, much more will an immense goodness and holiness in the fountain be rejected? He that wisheth a beam far from his eyes, because it offends and scorcheth him, can be no friend to the sun from whence that beam doth issue. How unworthy a creature is man, since he only, a rational creature, is the sole being that withdraws itself from the rule of God in this earth? And how miserable a creature is he also, since, departing from the order of God's goodness, he falls into the order of his justice; and while he refuseth God to be the rule of his life, he cannot avoid him being the judge of his punishment. It is this is the original of all sin, and the fountain of all our misery.

This is the first thing man disowns, the rule which God sets him.

2. Man naturally owns any other rule rather than that of God's prescribing. The law of God orders one thing, the heart of man desires another.

* Reyn.

† Qu. 'stream'?—ED.

There is not the basest thing in the world, but man would sooner submit to be guided by it, rather than by the holiness of God; and when anything that God commands crosses our own wills, we value it no more, than we would the advice of a poor despicable beggar.

How many are 'lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God!' 2 Tim. iii. 4. To make something which contributes to the perfection of nature, as learning, wisdom, moral virtues, our rule, would be more tolerable. But to pay that homage to a swinish pleasure, which is the right of God, is an inexcusable contempt of him. The greatest excellency in the world is infinitely below God; much more a bestial delight, which is both disgraceful and below the nature of man. If we made the vilest creature on earth our idol, it is more excusable than to be the slave of a brutish pleasure. The viler the thing is that doth possess the throne in our heart, the greater contempt it is of him who can only claim a right to it and is worthy of it. Sin is the first object of man's election, as soon as the faculty whereby he chooses comes to exercise its power; and it is so dear to man, that it is, in the estimate of our Saviour, counted as the right hand and the right eye, dear, precious, and useful members.

(1.) The rule of Satan is owned before the rule of God. The natural man would rather be under the guidance of Satan than the yoke of his Creator. Adam chose him to be his governor in paradise. No sooner had Satan spoke of God in a way of derision—Gen. iii. 1, 5, 'Yea, hath God said?'—but man follows his counsel and approves of the scoff; and the greatest part of his posterity have not been wiser by his fall, but would rather ramble in the devil's wilderness than to stay in God's fold. It is by the sin of man that the devil is become the god of the world, as if men were the electors of him to the government. Sin is an election of him for a lord, and a putting the soul under his government. Those that live according to the course of the world, and are loath to displease it, are under the government of the prince of it. The greatest part of the works done in the world is to enlarge the kingdom of Satan. For how many ages were the laws whereby the greatest part of the world was governed in the affairs of religion, the fruits of his usurpation and policy! When temples were erected to him, priests consecrated to his service, the rites used in most of the worship of the world were either of his own coining, or the misapplying the rites God had ordained to himself under the notion of a god; whence the apostle calls all idolatrous feasts 'the table of devils,' 'the cup of devils,' 'sacrifice to devils,' 'fellowship with devils,' 1 Cor. x. 20, 21. Devils being the real object of the pagan worship, though not formally intended by the worshipper, though in some parts of the Indies the direct and peculiar worship is to the devil, that he might not hurt them; and though the intention of others was to offer to God and not the devil, yet since the action was contrary to the will of God, he regards it as a sacrifice to devils. It was not the intention of Jeroboam to establish priests to the devil when he consecrated them to the service of his calves, for Jehu afterwards calls them 'the servants of the Lord:' 2 Kings x. 23, 'See if there be here none of the servants of the Lord,' to distinguish them from the servants of Baal, signifying that the true God was worshipped under those images, and not Baal, nor any of the gods of the heathens; yet Scripture couples the calves and devils together, and ascribes the worship given to one to be given to the other. 2 Chron. xi. 15, 'He ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made;' so that they were sacrifices to devils, notwithstanding the intention of Jeroboam and his subjects that had set them up and worshipped them, because they were contrary

to the mind of God, and agreeable to the doctrine and mind of Satan, though the object of their worship in their own intention were not the devil, but some deified man or some canonised saint. The intention makes not a good action; if so, when men kill the best servants of God with a design to do God service, as our Saviour foretells, John xvi. 2, the action would not be murder, yet who can call it otherwise, since God is wronged in the persons of his servants? Since most of the worship of the world, which men's corrupt natures incline them to, is false and different from the revealed will of God, it is a practical acknowledgment of the devil as the governor, by acknowledging and practising those doctrines which have not the stamp of divine revelation upon them, but were minted by Satan to depress the honour of God in the world. It doth concern men then to take good heed, that in their acts of worship they have a divine rule, otherwise it is an owning the devil as the rule, for there is no medium. Whatsoever is not from God is from Satan.

But to bring this closer to us, and consider that which is more common among us. Men that are in a natural condition, and wedded to their lusts, are under the paternal government of Satan: John viii. 44, 'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do.' If we divide sin into spiritual and carnal, which division comprehends all, the devil's authority is owned in both: in spiritual, we conform to his *example*, because those he commits; in carnal, we obey his *will*, because those he directs; he acts the one, and sets us a *copy*; he tempts to the other, and gives us a kind of a *precept*. Thus man by nature being a willing servant of sin, is more desirous to be bound in the devil's iron chains than in God's silken cords.

What greater atheism can there be than to use God as if he were inferior to the devil! to take the part of his greatest enemy, who drew all others into the faction against him! to pleasure Satan by offending God, and gratify our adversary with the injury of our Creator! For a subject to take arms against his prince with the deadliest enemy both himself and prince hath in the whole word, adds a greater blackness to the rebellion.

(2.) The more visible rule preferred before God in the world is man. The opinion of the world is more our rule than the precept of God, and many men's abstinence from sin is not from a sense of the divine will, no, nor from a principle of reason, but from an affection to some man on whom they depend, or fear of punishment from a superior; the same principle with that in a ravenous beast, who abstains from what he desires for fear only of a stick or club. Men will walk with the herds, go in fashion with the most, speak and act as the most do. While we 'conform to the world,' we cannot perform a 'reasonable service' to God, nor prove, nor approve practically, 'what the good and acceptable will of God is.' The apostle puts them in opposition to one another, Rom. xii. 1, 2.

This appears,

[1.] In complying more with the dictates of men than the will of God. Men draw encouragement from God's forbearance, to sin more freely against him, but the fear of punishment for breaking the will of man lays a restraint upon them; the fear of man is a more powerful curb to restrain men in their duty than the fear of God. So we may please a friend, a master, a governor, we are regardless whether we please God or no; men-pleasers are more than God-pleasers. Man is more advanced as a rule than God, when we submit to human orders, and stagger and dispute against divine. Would not a prince think himself slighted in his authority, if any of his servants should decline his commands, by the order of one of his subjects? And will not God make the same account of us when we deny or delay our

obedience for fear of one of his creatures? In the fear of man we as little acknowledge God for our sovereign as we do for our comforter: Isa. li. 12, 13, 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, &c., and forgettest the Lord thy maker,' &c. We put a slight upon God, as if he were not able to bear us out in our duty to him, and incapable to balance the strength of an arm of flesh.

[2.] In observing that which is materially the will of God, not because it is his will, but the injunctions of men. As the word of God may be received, yet not as his word, so the will of God may be performed, yet not as his will. It is materially done, but not formally obeyed. An action, and obedience in that action, are two things; as when man commands the ceasing from all works of the ordinary calling on the Sabbath, it is the same that God enjoins; the cessation or attendance of his servants on the hearing the word are conformable in the matter of it to the will of God, but it is only conformable in the obediential part of the acts to the will of man, when it is done only with respect to a human precept. As God hath a right to enact his laws without consulting his creature in the way of his government, so man is bound to obey those laws without consulting whether they be agreeable to men's laws or no. If we act the will of God, because the will of our superiors concurs with it, we obey not God in that, but man; a human will being the rule of our obedience, and not the divine, this is to vilify God, and make him inferior to man in our esteem, and a valuing the rule of man above that of our Creator.

Since God is the highest perfection, and infinitely good, whatsoever rule he gives the creature must be good, else it cannot proceed from God. A base thing cannot be the product of an infinite excellency, and an unreasonable thing cannot be the product of an infinite wisdom and goodness; therefore as the respecting God's will before the will of man is excellent and worthy of a creature, and is an acknowledging the excellency, goodness, and wisdom of God, so the eyeing the will of man before and above the will of God, is, on the contrary, a denial of all those in a lump, and a preferring the wisdom, goodness, and power of man in his law above all those perfections of God in his. Whatsoever men do that looks like moral virtue or abstinence from vices, not out of obedience to the rule God hath set, but because of custom, necessity, example, or imitation, they may in the doing of it be rather said to be apes than Christians.

[3.] In obeying the will of man when it is contrary to the will of God. As the Israelites willingly 'walked after the commandment,' Hosea v. 11, not of God, but of Jeroboam in the case of the calves, and 'made the king's heart glad with their lies,' Hosea vii. 3. They cheered him with their ready obedience to his command for idolatry (which was a lie in itself, and a lie in them) against the commandment of God and the warnings of the prophets, rather than cheer the heart of God with their obedience to his worship instituted by him; nay, and when God offered them to cure them their wound, their iniquity breaks out afresh; they would neither have him as a Lord to rule them, nor a physician to cure them: Hosea vii. 1, 'When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was discovered.' The whole Persian nation shrunk at once from a duty due by the light of nature to the Deity, upon a decree that neither God or man should be petitioned to for thirty days, but only their king, Dan. vi. One only, Daniel, excepted against it, who preferred his homage to God above obedience to his prince. An adulterous generation is many times made the rule of men's professions, as is implied in those words of our Saviour, Mark

viii. 38, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation.' Own him among his disciples, and be ashamed of him among his enemies. Thus men are said to deny God, Titus i. 16, when they attend to Jewish fables and the precepts of men rather than the word of God; when the decrees or canons of fallible men are valued at a higher rate, and preferred before the writings of the Holy Ghost by his apostles.

As man naturally disowns the rule God sets him, and owns any other rule than that of God's prescribing, so

• (3.) He doth this in order to the setting himself up as his own rule, as though our own wills, and not God's, were the true square and measure of goodness. We make an idol of our own wills; and as much as self is exalted, God is deposed; the more we esteem our own wills, the more we endeavour to annihilate the will of God; account nothing of him, the more we account of ourselves; and endeavour to render ourselves his superiors by exalting our own wills. No prince but would look upon his authority as invaded, his royalty derided, if a subject should resolve to be a law to himself in opposition to his known will. True piety is to hate ourselves, deny ourselves, and cleave solely to the service of God. To make ourselves our own rule, and the object of our chiefest love, is atheism. If self-denial be the greatest part of godliness, the great letter in the alphabet of religion, self-love is the great letter in the alphabet of practical atheism. Self is the great antichrist and antigod in the world, that 'sets up itself above all that is called God;' self-love is the captain of that black band, 2 Tim. iii. 2. It sits in the temple of God, and would be adored as God; self-love begins, but denying the power of godliness, which is the same with denying the ruling power of God, ends the list; it is so far from bending to the righteous will of the Creator, that it would have the eternal will of God stoop to the humour and unrighteous will of a creature; and this is the ground of the contention between the flesh and the Spirit in the heart of a renewed man; flesh wars for the godhead of self, and Spirit fights for the Godhead of God; the one would settle the throne of the Creator, and the other maintain a law of covetousness, ambition, envy, lust, in the stead of God.

The evidence of this will appear in these propositions.

Prop. 1. This is natural to man as he is corrupted. What was the venom of the sin of Adam, is naturally derived with his nature to all posterity. It was not the eating a forbidding apple, or the pleasing his palate, that Adam aimed at, or was the chief object of his desire; but to live independently on his Creator, and be a god to himself: Gen. iii. 5, 'You shall be as gods.' That which was the matter of the devil's temptation, was the incentive of man's rebellion. A likeness to God he aspired to in the judgment of God himself, an infallible interpreter of man's thoughts: 'Behold, man is become as one of us, to know good and evil,' in regard of self-sufficiency and being a rule to himself. The Jews understand the ambition of man to reach no further than an equality with the angelical nature; but Jehovah here understands it in another sense. God had ordered man by this prohibition not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; not to attempt the knowledge of good and evil of himself, but to wait upon the dictates of God; not to trust to his own counsels, but to depend wholly upon him for direction and guidance. Certainly he that would not hold off his hand from so small a thing as an apple, when he had his choice of the fruit of the garden, would not have denied himself any thing his appetite had desired, when that principle had prevailed upon him. He would not have stuck at a greater matter to pleasure himself with the dis-

pleasing of God, when for so small a thing he would incur the anger of his Creator.

Thus would he deify his own understanding against the wisdom of God, and his own appetite against the will of God. This desire of equality with God, a learned man* thinks the apostle intimates: Phil. ii. 6, 'Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.' The Son's being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, implies that the robbery of sacrilege committed by our first parents, for which the Son of God humbled himself to the death of the cross, was an attempt to be equal with God, and depend no more upon God's directions, but his own conduct, which could be no less than an invasion of the throne of God, and endeavour to put himself into a posture to be his mate. Other sins, adultery and theft, &c., could not be committed by him at that time, but he immediately puts forth his hand to usurp the power of his Maker. This treason is the old Adam in every man. The first Adam contradicted the will of God to set up himself: the second Adam humbled himself, and did nothing but by the command and will of his Father. This principle, wherein the venom of the old Adam lies, must be crucified to make way for the throne of the humble and obedient principle of the new Adam, or quickening Spirit. Indeed, sin in its own nature is nothing else but a willing according to self, and contrary to the will of God. Lusts are therefore called the wills of the flesh and of the mind, Eph. ii. 3. As the precepts of God are God's will, so the violations of these precepts is man's will; and thus man usurps a godhead to himself, by giving that honour to his own will which belongs to God; appropriating the right of rule to himself, and denying it to his Creator. That servant that acts according to his own will with a neglect of his master's, refuseth the duty of a servant, and invades the right of his master. This self-love, and desire of independency on God, has been the root of all sin in the world. The great controversy between God and man hath been, whether he or they shall be God; whether his reason or theirs, his will or theirs, shall be the guiding principle. As grace is the union of the will of God and the will of the creature, so sin is the opposition of the will of self to the will of God. 'Leaning to our own understanding' is opposed as a natural evil to 'trusting in the Lord,' a supernatural grace, Prov. iii. 5. Men commonly love what is their own, their own inventions, their own fancies; therefore the ways of a wicked man are called 'the ways of his own heart,' Eccles. xi. 9; and the ways of a superstitious man his own devices: Jer. xviii. 12, 'We will walk after our own devices;' we will be a law to ourselves. And what the psalmist says of the tongue,—'our tongues are our own, who shall control us?'—is as truly the language of men's hearts, our wills are our own, who shall check us?

Prop. 2. This is evident in the dissatisfaction of men with their own consciences, when they contradict the desires of self. Conscience is nothing but an actuated or reflex knowledge of a superior power and an equitable law; a law impressed, and a power above it impressing it. Conscience is not the law-giver, but the remembrancer to mind us of that law of nature imprinted upon our souls, and actuate the considerations of the duty and penalty, to apply the rule to our acts, and pass judgment upon matter of fact. It is to give the charge, urge the rule, enjoin the practice of those notions of right, as part of our duty and obedience.

But man is much displeased with the directions of conscience, as he is out of love with the accusations and condemning sentence of this officer of

* Dr Jackson.

God. We cannot naturally endure any quick and lively practical thoughts of God and his will, and distaste our own consciences for putting us in mind of it; they therefore 'like not to retain God in their knowledge,' Rom. i. 28; that is, God in their own consciences; they would blow it out as it is the candle of the Lord in them to direct them, and their acknowledgments of God, to secure themselves against the practice of its principles. They would stop all the avenues to any beam of light, and would not suffer a sparkle of divine knowledge to flutter in their minds, in order to set up another directing rule suited to the fleshly appetite; and when they cannot stop the light of it from glaring in their faces, they rebel against it, and cannot endure to abide in its paths, Job xxiv. 13. He speaks not of those which had the written word or special revelations, but only a natural light or traditional handed from Adam. Hence are all the endeavours to still it when it begins to speak, by some carnal pleasures, as Saul's evil spirit with a fit of music; or bribe it with some fits of a glavering devotion when it holds the law of God in its commanding authority before the mind; they would wipe out all the impressions of it when it presses the advances of God above self, and entertain it with no better compliment than Ahab did Elijah, 'Hast thou found me, O my enemy?'

If we are like to God in anything of our natural fabric, it is in the superior and more spiritual part of our souls. The resistance of that which is most like to God, and instead of God in us, is a disowning of the sovereign represented by that officer. He that would be without conscience, would be without God, whose vicegerent it is, and make the sensitive part, which conscience opposes, his lawgiver. Thus a man out of respect to sinful self, quarrels with his natural self, and cannot comport himself in a friendly behaviour to his internal implanted principles. He hates to come under the rebukes of them, as much as Adam hated to come into the presence of God, after he turned traitor against him. The bad entertainment God's deputy hath in us, reflects upon that God whose cause it pleads. It is upon no other account that men loathe the upright language of their own reasons in those matters, and wish the eternal silence of their own consciences, but as they maintain the rights of God, and would hinder the idol of self from usurping his Godhead and prerogative. Though this power be part of a man's self, rooted in his nature, as essential to him, and inseparable from him, as the best part of his being; yet he quarrels with it as it is God's deputy, and stickling for the honour of God in his soul, and quarrelling with that sinful self he would cherish above God. We are not displeased with this faculty barely as it exerciseth a self-reflection, but as it is God's vicegerent, and bears the mark of his authority in it. In some cases this self-reflecting act meets with good entertainment, when it acts not in contradiction to self, but suitable to natural affections: as suppose a man hath in his passion struck his child, and caused thereby some great mischief to him, the reflection of conscience will not be unwelcome to him, will work some tenderness in him, because it takes the part of self and of natural affection; but in the more spiritual concerns of God it will be rated as a busy body.

Prop. 3. Many, if not most actions, materially good in the world, are done more because they are agreeable to self, than as they are honourable to God. As the word of God may be heard not *as* his word, 1 Thes. ii. 13, but as there may be pleasing notions in it, or discourses against an opinion or party we disaffect, so the will of God may be performed, not as his will, but as it may gratify some selfish consideration, when we will please God so far as it may not displease ourselves, and serve him as our master, so far as his command may be a servant to our humour; when we consider not who

it is that commands, but how short it comes of displeasing that sin which rules in our heart, pick and choose what is least burdensome to the flesh and distasteful to our lusts.

He that doth the will of God, not out of conscience of that will, but because it is agreeable to himself, casts down the will of God, and sets his own will in the place of it, takes the crown from the head of God, and places it upon the head of self. If things are done, not because they are commanded by God, but desirable to us, it is a disobedient obedience; a conformity to God's will in regard of the matter, a conformity to our own will in regard of the motive; either as the things done are agreeable to natural and moral self, or sinful self.

1. As they are agreeable to natural or moral self. When men will practise some points of religion, and walk in the track of some divine precepts, not because they are divine, but because they are agreeable to their humour or constitution of nature; from the sway of a natural bravery, the bias of a secular interest, not from an ingenuous sense of God's authority, or a voluntary submission to his will; as when a man will avoid excess in drinking, not because it is dishonourable to God, but as it is a blemish to his own reputation, or an impair of the health of his body, doth this deserve the name of an observance of the divine injunction, or rather an obedience to ourselves? Or when a man will be liberal in the distribution of his charity, not with an eye to God's precept, but in compliance with his own natural compassion, or to pleasure the generosity of his nature. The one is obedience to a man's own preservation, the other an obedience to the interest or impulse of a moral virtue. It is not respect to the rule of God, but the authority of self, and, at the best, is but the performance of the material part of the divine rule, without any concurrence of a spiritual motive or a spiritual manner. That only is a maintaining the rights of God, when we pay an observance to his rule, without examining the agreeableness of it to our secular interest, or consulting with the humour of flesh and blood; when we will not decline his service, though we find it cross, and hath no affinity with the pleasure of our own nature; such an obedience as Abraham manifested in his readiness to sacrifice his son; such an obedience as our Saviour demands in cutting off the right hand. When we observe anything of divine order upon the account of its suitableness to our natural sentiments, we shall readily divide from him, when the interest of nature turns its point against the interest of God's honour; we shall fall off from him according to the change we find in our own humours: and can that be valued as a setting up the rule of God, which must be deposed upon the mutable interest of an inconstant mind? Esau had no regard to God in delaying the execution of his resolution to shorten his brother's days, though he was awed by the reverence of his father to delay it; he considered, perhaps, how justly he might lie under the imputation of hastening crazy Isaac's death, by depriving him of a beloved son. But had the old man's head been laid, neither the contrary command of God, nor the nearness of a fraternal relation, could have bound his hands from the act, no more than they did his heart from the resolution: Gen. xxvii. 41, 'Esau hated Jacob, because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother.'

So many children, that expect at the death of their parents great inheritances or portions, may be observant of them, not in regard of the rule fixed by God, but to their own hopes, which they would not frustrate by a disobedience. Whence is it that many men abstain from gross sins, but in love to their reputation? Wickedness may be acted privately, which a man's

own credit puts a bar to the open commission of. The preserving his own esteem may divert him from entering into a brothel-house, to which he hath set his mind before, against a known precept of his Creator. As Pharaoh parted with the Israelites, so do some men with their blemishing sins; not out of a sense of God's rule, but the smart of present judgments, or fear of a future wrath. Our security, then, and reputation, is set up in the place of God.

This also may be, and is, in renewed men, who have the law written in their hearts, that is, an habitual disposition to an agreement with the law of God; when what is done is with a respect to this habitual inclination, without eyeing the divine precept, which is appointed to be their rule. This also is to set up a creature, as renewed self is, instead of the Creator, and that law of his in his word, which ought to be the rule of our actions. Thus it is when men choose a moral life, not so much out of respect to the law of nature, as it is the law of God, but as it is a law become one with their souls and constitutions. There is more of self in this, than consideration of God; for if it were the latter, the revealed law of God would upon the same reason be received as well as his natural law. From this principle of self, morality comes by some to be advanced above evangelical dictates.

2. As they are agreeable to sinful self. Not that the commands of God are suited to bolster up the corruptions of men, no more than the law can be said to excite or revive sin, Rom. vii. 8, 9. But it is like a scandal taken, not given; an occasion taken by the tumultuousness of our depraved nature. The Pharisees were devout in long prayers, not from a sense of duty or a care of God's honour, but to satisfy their ambition, and rake together fuel for their covetousness (Mat. xxiii. 14, 'You devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers'), that they might have the greater esteem and richer offerings, to free by their prayers the souls of deceased persons from purgatory; an opinion that some think the Jewish synagogue had then entertained,* since some of their doctors have defended such a notion. Men may observe some precepts of God to have a better conveniency to break others. Jehu was ordered to cut off the house of Ahab; the service he undertook was in itself acceptable, but corrupt nature misacted that which holiness and righteousness commanded. God appointed it to magnify his justice, and check the idolatry that had been supported by that family. Jehu acted it to satisfy his revenge and ambition; he did it to fulfil his lust, not the will of God who enjoined him. Jehu applauds it as zeal, and God abhors it as murder, and therefore would 'avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu,' Hosea i. 4. Such kind of services are not paid to God for his own sake, but to ourselves for our lust's sake.

4. This is evident in neglecting to take God's direction upon emergent occasions. This follows the text, 'None did seek God.' When we consult not with him, but trust more to our own will and counsel, we make ourselves our own governors and lords, independent upon him; as though we could be our own counsellors, and manage our concerns without his leave and assistance; as though our works were in our own hands, and not in the hands of God, Ecces. ix. 1, that we can by our own strength and sagacity direct them to a successful end without him. If we must 'acquaint ourselves with God' before we decree a thing, Job xxii. 28, then to decree a thing without acquainting God with it, is to prefer our purblind wisdom before the infinite wisdom of God; to resolve without consulting God, is to depose God and deify self, our own wit and strength. We would rather, like Lot, follow our own humour and stay in Sodom, than observe the angel's order to go out of it.

* Gerrard *in loc.*

5. As we account the actions of others to be good or evil, as they suit with or spurn against our fancies and humours. Virtue is a crime, and vice a virtue, as it is contrary or concurrent with our humours. Little reason have many men to blame the actions of others, but because they are not agreeable to what they affect and desire. We would have all men take directions from us, and move according to our beck; hence that common speech in the world, Such an one is an honest friend. Why? Because he is of their humour, and lacqueys according to their wills. Thus we make self the measure and square of good and evil in the rest of mankind, and judge of it by our own fancies, and not by the will of God, the proper rule of judgment.

Well, then, let us consider,

Is not this very common, are we not naturally more willing to displease God than displease ourselves, when it comes to a point that we must do one or other? Is not our own counsel of more value with us than conformity to the will of the Creator? Do not our judgments often run counter to the judgment of God? Have his laws a greater respect from us than our own humours? Do we scruple the staining his honour when it comes in competition with our own? Are not the lives of most men a pleasing themselves, without a repentance that ever they displeased God? Is not this to undeify God, to deify ourselves, and disown the propriety he hath in us by the right of creation and beneficence? We order our own ways by our own humours, as though we were the authors of our own being, and had given ourselves life and understanding. This is to destroy the order that God hath placed between our wills and his own, and a lifting up of the foot above the head; it is the deformity of the creature. The honour of every rational creature consists in the service of the First Cause of his being; as the welfare of every creature consists in the orders and proportionable motion of its members, according to the law of its creation.

He that moves and acts according to a law of his own, offers a manifest wrong to God, the highest wisdom and chiefest good, disturbs the order of the world, nulls the design of the righteousness and holiness of God. The law of God is the rule of that order he would have observed in the world. He that makes another law his rule, thrusts out the order of the Creator, and establishes the disorder of the creature.

But this will yet be more evident in the fourth thing.

(4.) Man would make himself the rule of God, and give laws to his Creator. We are willing God should be our benefactor, but not our ruler; we are content to admire his excellency and pay him a worship, provided he will walk by our rule. 'This commits a riot upon his nature; to think him to be what we ourselves would have him and wish him to be, Ps. l. 21. We would amplify his mercy and contract his justice, we would have his power enlarged to supply our wants, and straitened when it goes about to revenge our crimes; we would have him wise to defeat our enemies, but not to disappoint our unworthy projects; we would have him all eye to regard our indigence, and blind, not to discern our guilt; we would have him true to his promises, regardless of his precepts, and false to his threatenings; we would new mint the nature of God according to our models, and shape a God according to our fancies, as he made us at first according to his own image.'* Instead of obeying him, we would have him obey us; instead of owning and admiring his perfections, we would have him strip himself of his infinite excellency, and clothe himself with a nature agreeable to our own.

* Decay of Christian piety, p. 169, somewhat changed.

This is not only to set up self as the law of God, but to make our own imaginations the model of the nature of God.

Corrupted man takes a pleasure to accuse or suspect the actions of God. We would not have him act conveniently to his nature, but act what doth gratify us, and abstain from what distastes us. Man is never well but when he is impeaching one or other perfection of God's nature, and undermining his glory; as if all his attributes must stand indicted at the bar of our purblind reason. This weed shoots up in the exercise of grace. Peter intended the refusal of our Saviour's washing his feet as an act of humility, but Christ understands it to be a prescribing a law to himself, a correcting his love, John xiii. 8, 9.

This is evidenced,

(1.) In the strivings against his law. How many men imply by their lives that they would have God deposed from his government, and some unrighteous being step into his throne; as if God had or should change his laws of holiness into laws of licentiousness, as if he should abrogate his old eternal precepts and enact contrary ones in their stead. What is the language of such practices, but that they would be God's lawgivers and not his subjects; that he should deal with them according to their own wills, and not according to his righteousness; that they could make a more holy, wise, and righteous law than the law of God; that their imaginations, and not God's righteousness, should be the rule of his doing good to them? Jer. ix. 13, 'They have forsaken my law, and walked after the imaginations of their own heart.'

When an act is known to be a sin, and the law that forbids it acknowledged to be the law of God, and after this we persist in that which is contrary to it, we tax his wisdom as if he did not understand what was convenient for us; we would 'teach God knowledge,' Job xxi. 22; it is an implicit wish that God had laid aside the holiness of his nature, and framed a law to pleasure our lusts. When God calls for weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth upon approaching judgments, then the corrupt heart is for joy and gladness, eating of flesh and drinking of wine, because to-morrow they should die, Isa. xxii. 12, 13; as if God had mistaken himself when he ordered them so much sorrow when their lives were so near an end, and had lost his understanding when he ordered such a precept. Disobedience is therefore called contention—Rom. ii. 8, 'Contentious, and obey not the truth'—contention against God, whose truth it is that they disobey; a dispute with him, which hath more of wisdom in itself and conveniency for them, his truth or their imaginations. The more the love, goodness, and holiness of God appears in any command, the more are we naturally averse from it, and cast an imputation on him, as if he were foolish, unjust, cruel, and that we could have advised and directed him better. The goodness of God is eminent to us in appointing a day for his own worship, wherein we might converse with him and he with us, and our souls be refreshed with spiritual communications from him; and we rather use it for the ease of our bodies than the advancement of our souls, as if God were mistaken and injured his creature when he urged the spiritual part of duty. Every disobedience to the law is an implicit giving law to him, and a charge against him that he might have provided better for his creature.

(2.) In disapproving the methods of God's government of the world. If the counsels of heaven roll not about according to their schemes, instead of adoring the unsearchable depths of his judgments, they call him to the bar, and accuse him, because they are not fitted to their narrow vessels, as if a nut-shell could contain an ocean. As corrupt reason esteems the highest

truths foolishness, so it counts the most righteous ways unequal. Thus we commence a suit against God, as though he had not acted righteously and wisely, but must give an account of his proceedings at our tribunal. This is to make ourselves God's superiors, and presume to instruct him better in the government of the world; as though God hindered himself and the world in not making us of his privy council, and not ordering his affairs according to the contrivances of our dim understandings.

Is not this manifest in our immoderate complaints of God's dealings with his church, as though there were a coldness in God's affections to his church, and a glowing heat towards it only in us? Hence are those importunate desires for things which are not established by any promise, as though we would overrule and over-persuade God to comply with our humour. We have an ambition to be God's tutors, and direct him in his counsels; 'Who hath been his counsellor,' saith the apostle? Rom. xi. 34. Who ought not to be his counsellor, saith corrupt nature? Men will find fault with God in what he suffers to be done according to their own minds, when they feel the bitter fruit of it. When Cain had killed his brother, and his conscience racked him, how saucily and discontentedly doth he answer God: Gen. iv. 9, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Since thou dost own thyself the rector of the world, thou shouldst have preserved his person from my fury; since thou dost accept his sacrifice before my offering, preservation was due as well as acceptance. If this temper be found on earth, no wonder it is lodged in hell. That deplorable person, under the sensible stroke of God's sovereign justice, would oppose his *nay* to God's will: Luke xvi. 30, 'And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent.' He would presume to prescribe more effectual means than Moses and the prophets to inform men of the danger they incurred by their sensuality. 'David was displeased,' it is said, 2 Sam. vi. 8, 'when the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah;' not with Uzzah, who was the object of his pity, but with God, who was the inflicter of that punishment.

When any of our friends have been struck with a rod against our sentiments and wishes, have not our hearts been apt to swell in complaints against God, as though he disregarded the goodness of such a person, did not see with our eyes, and measure him by our esteem of him? As if he should have asked our counsel before he had resolved, and managed himself according to our will rather than his own. If he be patient to the wicked, we are apt to tax his holiness, and accuse him as an enemy to his own law. If he inflict severity upon the righteous, we are ready to suspect his goodness, and charge him to be an enemy to his affectionate creature. If he spare the Nimrods of the world, we are ready to ask, 'Where is the God of judgment?' Mal. ii. 17. If he afflict the pillars of the earth, we are ready to question, Where is the God of mercy? It is impossible, since the depraved nature of man, and the various interests and passions in the world, that infinite power and wisdom can act righteously for the good of the universe, but he will shake some corrupt interest or other upon the earth; so various are the inclinations of men, and such a weather-cock judgment hath every man in himself, that the divine method he applauds this day, upon a change of his interest, he will cavil at the next. It is impossible for the just orders of God to please the same person many weeks, scarce many minutes together. God must cease to be God, or to be holy, if he should manage the concerns of the world according to the fancies of men.

How unreasonable is it thus to impose laws upon God? Must God revoke his own orders? govern according to the dictates of his creature? Must God, who hath only power and wisdom to sway the sceptre, become

the obedient subject of every man's humour, and manage everything to serve the design of a simple creature? This is not to be God, but to set the creature in his throne. Though this be not formally done, yet that it is interpretatively and practically done is every hour's experience.

(3.) In impatience in our particular concerns. It is ordinary with man to charge God in his complaints in the time of affliction. Therefore it is the commendation the Holy Ghost gives to Job: Job i. 22, that 'in all this,' that is, in those many waves that rolled over him, 'he did not charge God foolishly;' he never spake nor thought anything unworthy of the majesty and righteousness of God. Yet afterwards, we find him warping; he nick-names the affliction to be God's oppression of him, and no act of his goodness: Job x. 3, 'Is it good for thee that thou shouldst oppress?' He seems to charge God with injustice for punishing him when he was not wicked, for which he appeals to God, 'Thou knowest that I am not wicked,' ver. 7, and that God acted not like a Creator, ver. 8.

If our projects are disappointed, what fretfulness against God's management are our hearts racked with! How do uncomely passions bubble up in us, interpretatively at least, wishing that the arms of his power had been bound, and the eye of his omniscience been hoodwinked, that we might have been left to our own liberty and design; and this oftentimes when we have more reason to bless him than repine at him. The Israelites murmured more against God in the wilderness, with manna in their mouths, than they did at Pharaoh in the brick kilns, with their garlic and onions between their teeth. Though we repine at instruments in our afflictions, yet God counts it a reflection upon himself. The Israelites speaking against Moses, was in God's interpretation a rebellion against himself, Num. xvi. 41 compared with xvii. 10. A rebellion is always a desire of imposing laws and conditions upon those against whom the rebellion is raised. The sottish dealings of the vine-dressers in Franconia with the statue of St Urban, the protector of the vines, upon his own day, is an emblem of our dealing with God. If it be a clear day, and portend a prosperous vintage, they honour the statue, and drink healths to it; if it be a rainy day, and presage a scantiness, they daub it with dirt in indignation. We cast out our mire and dirt against God when he acts cross to our wishes, and flatter him when the wind of his providence joins itself to the tide of our interest.

Men set a high price upon themselves, and are angry God values them not at the same rate, as if their judgment concerning themselves were more piercing than his. This is to 'disannul God's judgment,' and 'condemn him,' and 'count ourselves righteous,' as it is Job xl. 8. This is the epidemical disease of human nature; they think they deserve caresses instead of rods, and upon crosses are more ready to tear out the heart of God than reflect humbly upon their own hearts. When we accuse God, we applaud ourselves, and make ourselves his superiors, intimating that we have acted more righteously to him than he to us, which is the highest manner of imposing laws upon him, as that emperor accused the justice of God for snatching him out of the world too soon.* What an high piece of practical atheism is this, to desire that that infinite wisdom should be guided by our folly, and asperse the righteousness of God rather than blemish our own. Instead of silently submitting to his will and adoring his wisdom, we declaim against him as an unwise and unjust governor. We would invert his order, make him the steward, and ourselves the proprietors of what we are and have. We deny ourselves to be sinners, and our mercies to be forfeited.

(4.) It is evidenced in envying the gifts and prosperities of others. Envy

* *Cælum suspiciens vitam, &c. Vita Titi, ca. 10.*

hath a deep tincture of practical atheism, and is a cause of atheism.* We are unwilling to leave God to be the proprietor, and do what he will with his own, and as a Creator to do what he pleases with his creatures; we assume a liberty to direct God what portions, when and how he should bestow upon his creatures; we would not let him choose his own favourites, and pitch upon his own instruments for his glory. As if God should have asked counsel of us how he should dispose of his benefits. We are unwilling to leave to his wisdom the management of his own judgments to the wicked, and the dispensation of his own love to ourselves. This temper is natural; it is as ancient as the first age of the world. Adam envied God a felicity by himself, and would not spare a tree that he had reserved as a mark of his sovereignty. The passion that God had given Cain to employ against his sin he turns against his Creator; he was wroth with God, Gen. iv. 5, and with Abel; but envy was at the root, because his brother's sacrifice was accepted and his refused. How could he envy his accepted person without reflecting upon the acceptor of his offering! Good men have not been free from it. Job questions the goodness of God, that he should 'shine upon the counsel of the wicked,' Job x. 3. Jonah had too much of self in fearing to be counted a false prophet, when he came with absolute denunciations of wrath, Jonah iv. 2. And when he could not bring a volley of destroying judgments upon the Ninevites, he would shoot his fury against his master, envying those poor people the benefit, and God the honour of his mercy; and this after he had been sent into the whale's belly to learn humiliation, which, though he exercised there, yet those two great branches of self-pride and envy were not lopped off from him in the belly of hell. And God was fain to take pains with him, and by a gourd scarce makes him ashamed of his peevishness. Envy is not like to cease, till all atheism be cashiered, and that is in heaven.

This sin is an imitation of the devil, whose first sin upon earth was envy, as his first sin in heaven was pride. It is a wishing that to ourselves which the devil asserted as his right, to give the kingdoms of the world to whom he pleased, Luke iv. 6. It is an anger with God because he hath not given us a patent for government. It utters the same language in disparagement of God as Absalom did in reflection on his father: If I were king in Israel, justice should be better managed; if I were Lord of the world, there should be more wisdom to discern the merits of men, and more righteousness in distributing to them their several portions. Thus we impose laws upon God, and would have the righteousness of his will submit to the corruptions of ours, and have him lower himself to gratify our minds rather than fulfil his own. We charge the author of those gifts with injustice, that he hath not dealt equally, or with ignorance, that he hath mistook his mark. In the same breath that we censure him by our peevishness, we would guide him by our wills.

This is an unreasonable part of atheism. If all were in the same state and condition, the order of the world would be impaired. Is God bound to have a care of thee, and neglect all the world besides? 'Shall the earth be forsaken for thee?' Job xviii. 4. Joseph had reason to be displeased with his brothers, if they had muttered, because he gave Benjamin a double portion, and the rest a single. It was unfit that they, who had deserved no gift at all, should prescribe him rules how to dispense his own doles. Much more unworthy is it to deal so with God; yet this is too rife.

(5.) It is evidenced in corrupt matters or ends of prayer and praise. When we are importunate for those things that we know not whether the

* Because wicked men flourish in the world; *Sollicitor nullos esse putare Deos.*

righteousness, holiness, and wisdom of God can grant, because he hath not discovered his will in any promise to bestow them, we would then impose such conditions on God which he never obliged himself to grant, when we pray for things not so much to glorify God, which ought to be the end of prayer, as to gratify ourselves. We acknowledge, indeed, by the act of petitioning, that there is a God, but we would have him un-God himself to be at our beck, and debase himself to serve our turns. When we desire those things which are repugnant to those attributes whereby he doth manage the government of the world; when by some superficial services we think we have gained indulgence to sins, which seems to be the thought of the strumpet in her paying her vows to wallow more freely in the mire of her sensual pleasures: *Prov. vii. 14*, 'I have peace-offerings with me; this day I have paid my vows.' I have made my peace with God, and have entertainment for thee. Or when men desire God to bless them in the commission of some sin. As when Balak and Balaam offered sacrifices that they might prosper in the cursing of the Israelites, *Num. xxv. 1*, &c.

So for a man to pray to God to save him, while he neglects the means of salvation appointed by God, or to renew him when he slights the word, the only instrument to that purpose, this is to impose laws upon God contrary to the declared will and wisdom of God, and to desire him to slight his own institutions. When we come into the presence of God with lusts reeking in our hearts, and leap from sin to duty, we would impose the law of our corruption on the holiness of God. While we pray the will of God may be done, self-love wishes its own will may be performed, as though God should serve our humours when we will not obey his precepts. And when we make vows under any affliction, what is it often but a secret contrivance to bend and flatter him to our conditions! We will serve him if he will restore us; we think thereby to compound the business with him, and bring him down to our terms.

(6.) It is evidenced in positive and bold interpretations of the judgments of God in the world. To interpret the judgments of God to the disadvantage of the sufferer, unless it be an unusual judgment, and have a remarkable hand of God in it, and the sin be rendered plainly legible in the affliction, is a presumption of this nature. When men will judge the Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with the sacrifices, greater sinners than others, and themselves righteous, because no drops of it were dashed upon them; or when Shimei, being of the house of Saul, shall judge according to his own interest, and desires David's flight upon Absalom's rebellion to be a punishment for invading the rights of Saul's family, and depriving him of the succession in the kingdom, *2 Sam. xvi. 5*, as if he had been of God's privy council when he decreed such acts of justice in the world.

Thus we would fasten our own wills as a law or motive upon God, and interpret his acts according to the motions of self. Is it not too ordinary, when God sends an affliction upon those that bear ill will to us, to judge it to be a righting of our cause, to be a fruit of God's concern for us in revenging our wrongs, as if we had heard the secrets of God, or as Eliphaz saith, had turned over the records of heaven, *Job xv. 8*. This is a judgment according to self-love, not a divine rule, and imposeth laws upon heaven, implying a secret wish that God would take care only of them, make our concerns his own, not in ways of kindness and justice, but according to our fancies. And this is common in the profane world, in those curses they so readily spit out upon any affront; as if God were bound to draw his arrows and shoot them into the heart of all their offenders at their beck and pleasure.

(7.) It is evidenced, in mixing rules for the worship of God, with those

which have been ordered by him. Since men are most prone to live by sense, it is no wonder that a sensible worship, which affects their outward sense with some kind of amazement, is dear to them, and spiritual worship most loathsome.

Pompous rites have been the great engine wherewith the devil hath deceived the souls of men, and wrought them to a nauseating the simplicity of divine worship, as unworthy the majesty and excellency of God, 2 Cor. xi. 3. Thus the Jews would not understand the glory of the second temple in the presence of the Messiah, because it had not the pompous grandeur of that of Solomon's erecting.

Hence in all ages men have been forward to disfigure God's models, and dress up a brat of their own; as though God had been defective in providing for his own honour in his institutions without the assistance of his creature. This hath always been in the world: the old world had their imaginations, and the new world hath continued them. The Israelites, in the midst of miracles, and under the memory of a famous deliverance, would erect a calf. The Pharisees, that sat in Moses's chair, would coin new traditions, and enjoin them to be as current as the law of God, Mat. xxiii. 6. Papists will be blending the Christian appointments with pagan ceremonies, to please the carnal fancies of the common people. Altars have been multiplied, under the knowledge of the law of God, Hos. viii. 12. Interest is made the balance of the conveniency of God's injunctions. Jeroboam fitted a worship to politic ends, and posted up calves to prevent his subjects revolting from his sceptre, which might be occasioned by their resort to Jerusalem, and converse with the body of the people from whom they were separated, 1 Kings xii. 27. Men will be putting their own dictates with God's laws, and are unwilling he should be the sole governor of the world without their counsel: they will not suffer him to be the Lord of that which is purely and solely his concern. How often hath the practice of the primitive church, the custom wherein we are bred, the sentiments of our ancestors, been owned as a more authentic rule in matters of worship, than the mind of God delivered in his word! It is natural by creation to worship God; and it is as natural by corruption for man to worship him in a human way, and not in a divine. Is not this to impose laws upon God? to esteem ourselves wiser than he? to think him negligent of his own service, and that our feeble brains can find out ways to accommodate his honour better than himself hath done? Thus do men for the most part equal their own imaginations to God's oracles: as Solomon built a high place to Moloch and Chemosh, upon the mount of Olives, to face on the east part Jerusalem and the temple, 1 Kings xi. 7. This is not only to impose laws on God, but also to make self the standard of them.

(8.) It is evidenced, in fitting interpretations of Scripture to their own minds and humours. Like the Lacedæmonians, that dressed the images of their gods according to the fashion of their own country, we would wring Scripture to serve our own designs, and judge the law of God by the law of sin, and make the serpentine seed in us to be the interpreter of divine oracles. This is like Belshazzar; to drink healths out of the sacred vessels. As God is the author of his law and word, so he is the best interpreter of it; the Scripture having an impress of divine wisdom, holiness, and goodness, must be regarded according to that impress, with a submission and meekness of spirit and reverence of God in it. But when in our inquiries into the word, we inquire not of God, but consult flesh and blood, the temper of the times wherein we live, or the satisfaction of a party we side withal, and impose glosses upon it according to our own fancies, it is to

put laws upon God, and make self the rule of him. He that interprets the law to bolster up some eager appetite against the will of the lawgiver, ascribes to himself as great an authority as he that enacted it.

(9.) In falling off from God after some fair compliances, when his will grateth upon us and crosseth ours. They will walk with him as far as he pleaseth them, and leave him upon the first distaste, as though God must observe their humours more than they his will. Amos must be suspended from prophesying, because 'the land could not bear his words,' Amos vii. 10, &c., and his discourses condemned their unworthy practices against God. The young man came not to receive directions from our Saviour, but expected a confirmation of his own rules, rather than an imposition of new, Mark x. 17, 22. He rather cares for commendations than instructions, and upon the disappointment turns his back: 'he was sad,' that Christ would not suffer him to be rich and a Christian together, and leaves him because his command was not suitable to the law of his covetousness. Some truths that are at a further distance from us we can hear gladly; but when the conscience begins to smart under others, if God will not observe our wills, we will with Herod be a law to ourselves, Mark vi. 20, 27.

More instances might be observed.

Ingratitude is a setting up self, and an imposing laws on God. It is as much as to say God did no more than he was obliged to do; as if the mercies we have were an act of duty in God, and not of bounty. Insatiable desires after wealth: hence are those speeches, James iv. 13, 'We will go into such a city, and buy and sell,' &c., 'to get gain;' as though they had the command of God, and God must lacquey after their wills. When our hearts are not contented with any supply of our wants, but are craving an overplus for our lust; when we are unsatisfied in the midst of plenty, and still, like the grave, cry, Give, give.

Incorrigibleness under affliction, &c.

II. The second main thing. As man would be a law to himself, so he would be his own end and happiness in opposition to God.

Here four things shall be discoursed on:

1. Man would make himself his own end and happiness.
2. He would make any thing his end and happiness rather than God.
3. He would make himself the end of all creatures.
4. He would make himself the end of God.

1. Man would make himself his own end and happiness. As God ought to be esteemed the first cause, in point of our dependence on him, so he ought to be our last end, in point of our enjoyment of him. When we therefore trust in ourselves, we refuse him as the first cause; and when we act for ourselves, and expect a blessedness from ourselves, we refuse him as the chiefest good, and last end, which is an undeniable piece of atheism; for man is a creature of a higher rank than others in the world, and was not made, as animals, plants, and other works of the divine power, materially to glorify God; but a rational creature, intentionally to honour God by obedience to his rule, dependence on his goodness, and zeal for his glory. It is therefore as much a slighting of God, for man, a creature, to set himself up as his own end, as to regard himself as his own law.

For the discovery of this, observe that there is a threefold self-love.

(1.) Natural, which is common to us by the law of nature with other creatures, inanimate as well as animate, and so closely twisted with the nature of every creature, that it cannot be dissolved but with the dissolution of nature itself. It consisted not with the wisdom and goodness of God to create an unnatural nature, or to command any thing unnatural:

nor doth he; for when he commands us to sacrifice ourselves, and dearest lives for himself, it is not without a promise of a more noble state and being in exchange for what we lose. This self-love is not only commendable, but necessary, as a rule to measure that duty we owe to our neighbour, whom we cannot love as ourselves, if we do not first love ourselves: God having planted this self-love in our nature, makes this natural principle the measure of our affection to all mankind of the same blood with ourselves.

(2.) Carnal self-love; when a man loves himself above God, in opposition to God, with a contempt of God; when our thoughts, affections, designs, centre only in our own fleshly interest, and rifle God of his honour, to make a present of it to ourselves. Thus the natural self-love, in itself good, becomes criminal by the excess, when it would be superior and not subordinate to God.

(3.) A gracious self-love. When we love ourselves for higher ends than the nature of a creature, as a creature dictates, viz., in subserviency to the glory of God, this is a reduction of the revolted creature to his true and happy order. A Christian is therefore said to be 'created in Christ to good works,' Eph. ii. 10. As all creatures were created, not only for themselves, but for the honour of God, so the grace of the new creation carries a man to answer this end, and to order all his operations to the honour of God and his well-pleasing.

The first is from nature, the second from sin, the third from grace. The first is implanted by creation, the second the fruit of corruption, the third is by the powerful operation of grace.

This carnal self-love is set up in the stead of God as our last end; like the sea, which all the little and great streams of our actions run to, and rest in. And this is,

1. Natural. It sticks as close to us as our souls; it is as natural as sin, the foundation of all the evil in the world. As self-aborrancy is the first stone that is laid in conversion, so an inordinate self-love was the first inlet to all iniquity. As grace is a rising from self to centre in God, so is sin a shrinking from God into the mire of a carnal selfishness. Since every creature is nearest to itself, and, next, to God, it cannot fall from God, but must immediately sink into self;* and therefore all sins are well said to be branches or modifications of this fundamental passion. What is wrath but a defence and strengthening self against the attempts of some real or imaginary evil? Whence springs envy, but from a self-love, grieved at its own wants in the midst of another's enjoyment, able to supply it? What is impatience, but a regret that self is not provided for at the rate of our wish, and that it hath met with a shock against supposed merit? What is pride, but a sense of self-worth, a desire to have self of a higher elevation than others? What is drunkenness, but a seeking a satisfaction for sensual self in the spoils of reason? No sin is committed as sin, but as it pretends a self-satisfaction. Sin indeed may well be termed a man's self, because it is, since the loss of original righteousness, the form that overspreads every part of our souls. The understanding assents to nothing false, but under the notion of true, and the will embraceth nothing evil, but under the notion of good; but the rule whereby we measure the truth and goodness of proposed objects is not the unerring word, but the inclinations of self, the gratifying of which is the aim of our whole lives.

Sin and self are all one. What is called a 'living to sin' in one place, Rom. vi., is called a living to self in another: 2 Cor. v. 15, 'That they that live should not live unto themselves.' And upon this account it is

* More, Dial. ii. sect. 17, page 274.

that both the Hebrew word **חטא**, and the Greek word *ἀμαρτάνειν*, used in Scripture to express sin, properly signify to miss the mark, and swerve from that *white* to which all our actions should be directed, viz., the glory of God. When we fell to loving ourselves, we fell from loving God; and therefore, when the psalmist saith, Ps. xiv. 2, there were none that sought God, viz., as the last end, he presently adds, 'they are all gone aside,' viz., from their true mark, and therefore become filthy.

2. Since it is natural, it is also universal. The not seeking God is as universal as our ignorance of him. No man in a state of nature but hath it predominant; no renewed man on this side heaven but hath it partially: the one hath it flourishing, the other hath it struggling. If to aim at the glory of God as the chief end, and not to live to ourselves, be the greatest mark of the restoration of the divine image, 2 Cor. v. 15, and a conformity to Christ, who glorified not himself, Heb. v. 5, but the Father, John xvii. 4, then every man wallowing in the mire of corrupt nature pays a homage to self, as a renewed man is biassed by the honour of God.

The Holy Ghost excepts none from this crime: Philip. ii. 21, 'All seek their own.' It is rare for them to look above or beyond themselves; whatsoever may be the immediate subject of their thoughts and inquiries, yet the utmost end and stage is their profit, honour, or pleasure. Whatever it be, that immediately possesses the mind and will, self sits like a queen, and sways the sceptre, and orders things at that rate, that God is excluded, and can find no room in all his thoughts: Ps. x. 4, 'The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God; God is not in all his thoughts.' The whole little world of man is so overflowed with a deluge of self, that the dove, the glory of the Creator, can find no place where to set its foot; and if ever it gain the favour of admittance, it is to disguise and be a vassal to some carnal project; as the glory of God was a mask for the murdering his servants.

It is from the power of this principle that the difficulty of conversion ariseth. As there is no greater pleasure to a believing soul than the giving itself up to God, and no stronger desire in him than to have a fixed and unchangeable will to serve the designs of his honour, so there is no greater torment to a wicked man than to part with his carnal ends, and lay down the Dagon of self at the feet of the ark. Self-love and self-opinion in the Pharisees, waylaid all the entertainment of truth: John v. 44, 'They sought honour one of another, and not the honour which comes from God.' It is of so large an extent, and so insinuating nature, that it winds itself into the exercise of moral virtues, mixeth with our charity, Mat. vi. 2, and finds nourishment in the ashes of martyrdom, 1 Cor. xiii. 3.

This making ourselves our end will appear in a few things.

(1.) In frequent self-applauses, and inward overweening reflections. Nothing more ordinary in the natures of men, than a dotage on their own perfections, acquisitions, or actions in the world. Most 'think of themselves above what they ought to think,' Rom. xii. 3, 4. Few think of themselves so meanly as they ought to think: this sticks as close to us as our skin; and as humility is the beauty of grace, this is the filthiest soil of nature. Our thoughts run more delightfully upon the track of our own perfections than the excellency of God; and when we find any thing of a seeming worth, that may make us glitter in the eyes of the world, how cheerfully do we grasp and embrace ourselves! When the grosser profanenesses of men have been discarded, and the floods of them dammed up, the head of corruption, whence they sprang, will swell the higher within, in self-applauding speculations of their own reformation, without acknowledgments of their own weaknesses,

and desires of divine assistance to make a further progress. 'I thank God I am not like this publican,' Luke xviii. 11. A self-reflection, with a contempt rather than compassion to his neighbour, is frequent in every Pharisee. The vapours of self-affections in our clouded understandings, like those in the air in misty mornings, alter the appearance of things, and make them look bigger than they are. This is thought by some to be the sin of the fallen angels, who, reflecting upon their own natural excellency, superior to other creatures, would find a blessedness in their own nature, as God did in his, and make themselves the last end of their actions. It is from this principle we are naturally so ready to compare ourselves, rather with those that are below us, than with those that are above us; and often think those that are above us inferior to us, and secretly glory that we are become none of the meanest and lowest in natural or moral excellencies.

How far were the gracious penmen of the Scripture from this, who when possessed and directed by the Spirit of God, and filled with a sense of him, instead of applauding themselves, publish upon record their own faults to all the eyes of the world! And if Peter, as some think, dictated the Gospel, which Mark wrote as his amanuensis, it is observable that his crime in denying his Master, is aggravated in that gospel in some circumstances, and less spoken of his repentance than in the other evangelists: 'When he thought thereon, he wept,' Mark xiv. 72; but in the other, 'he went out, and wept bitterly,' Luke xxii. 62.

This is one part of atheism and self-idolatry, to magnify ourselves, with the forgetfulness and to the injury of our Creator.

(2.) In ascribing the glory of what we do or have to ourselves, to our own wisdom, power, virtue, &c. How flaunting is Nebuchadnezzar at the prospect of Babylon, which he had exalted to be the head of so great an empire: Dan. iv. 30, 'Is not this great Babylon that I have built? For,' &c. He struts upon the battlements of his palace, as if there were no God but himself in the world, while his eye could not but see the heavens above him to be none of his own framing; attributing his acquisitions to his own arm, and referring them to his own honour, for his own delight; not for the honour of God, as a creature ought; nor for the advantage of his subjects, as the duty of a prince. He regards Babylon as his heaven, and himself as his idol, as if he were all, and God nothing. An example of this we have in the present age; but it is often observed that God vindicates his own honour, brings the most heroic men to contempt and unfortunate ends, as a punishment of their pride, as he did here: Dan. iv. 31, 'When the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven,' &c.* This was Herod's crime, to suffer others to do it. He had discovered his eloquence actively, and made himself his own end passively, in approving the flatteries of the people, and offered not with one hand to God the glory he received from his people with the other, Acts xii. 22, 23. Samosatenus is reported to put down the hymns which were sung for the glory of God and Christ, and caused songs to be sung in the temple for his own honour.

When anything succeeds well, we are ready to attribute it to our own prudence and industry. If we meet with a cross, we fret against the stars and fortune and second causes, and sometimes against God, as they curse God as well as their king, Isa. viii. 21, not acknowledging any defect in themselves. The psalmist, by his repetition of 'Not unto us, not unto us, but to thy name give glory,' Ps. cxv. 1, implies the naturalness of this temper, and the difficulty to cleanse our hearts from those self-reflections. If it be angelical to refuse an undue glory stolen from God's throne, Rev.

* Sanderson's Sermons.

xxii. 8, 9, it is diabolical to accept and cherish it. 'To seek our own glory is not glory,' Prov. xxv. 27. It is vile, and the dishonour of a creature, who, by the law of his creation, is referred to another end. So much as we sacrifice to our own credit, to the dexterity of our hands, or the sagacity of our wit, we detract from God.

(3.) In desires to have self-pleasing doctrines. When we cannot endure to hear anything that crosses the flesh, though the wise man tells us, 'It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than the song of fools,' Eccles. vii. 5. If Hanani the seer reprove king Asa for not relying on the Lord, his passion shall be armed for self against the prophet, and arrest him a prisoner, 2 Chron. xvi. 10. If Micajah declare to Ahab the evil that shall befall him, Amon the governor shall receive orders to clap him up in a dungeon. Fire doth not sooner seize upon combustible matter than fury will be kindled, if self be but pinched. This interest of lustful self barred the heart of Herodias against the entertainment of the truth, and caused her savagely to dip her hands in the blood of the Baptist, to make him a sacrifice to that inward idol, Mark vi. 18, 19, 28.

(4.) In being highly concerned for injuries done to ourselves, and little or not at all concerned for injuries done to God. How will the blood rise in us, when our honour and reputation is invaded, and scarce reflect upon the dishonour God suffers in our sight and hearing, violent passions will transform us into Boanergeses in the one case, and our unconcernedness render us Gallios in the other. We shall extenuate that which concerns God, and aggravate that which concerns ourselves. Nothing but the death of Jonathan, a firstborn and a generous son, will satisfy his father Saul, when the authority of his edict was broken by his tasting of honey, though he had recompensed his crime, committed in ignorance, by the purchase of a gallant victory. But when the authority of God was violated in saving the Amalekites' cattle against the command of a greater sovereign than himself, he can daub the business, and excuse it with a design of sacrificing. He was not so earnest in hindering the people from the breach of God's command, as he was in vindicating the honour of his own, 1 Sam. xv. 21. He could hardly admit of an excuse to save his own honour; but in the concerns of God's honour pretends piety, to cloak his avarice.

And it is often seen, when the violation of God's authority and the stain of our own reputation are coupled together, we are more troubled for what disgraces us than for what dishonours God. When Saul had thus transgressed, he is desirous that Samuel would turn again to preserve his own honour before the elders, rather than grieved that he had broken the command of God, ver. 30.

(5.) In trusting in ourselves; when we consult with our own wit and wisdom, more than inquire of God, and ask leave of him. As the Assyrian, Isa. x. 13, 'By the strength of my hands I have done it, and by wisdom, for I am prudent.' When we attempt things in the strength of our own heads and parts, and trust in our own industry, without application to God for direction, blessing, and success, we affect the privilege of the Deity, and make gods of ourselves; the same language in reality with Ajax in Sophocles, 'Others think to overcome with the assistance of the gods, but I hope to gain honour without them.' Dependence and trust is an act due from the creature only to God. Hence God aggravates the crime of the Jews in trusting in Egypt: Isa. xxxi. 3, 'The Egyptians are men, and not gods.' Confidence in ourselves is a defection from God, Jer. xvii. 5. And when we depart from and cast off God to depend upon ourselves, which is but an arm of flesh, we choose the arm of flesh for our god; we rob God of that

confidence we ought to place in him, and that adoration which is due to him, and build it upon another foundation. Not that we are to neglect the reason and parts God hath given us, or spend more time in prayer than in consulting about our own affairs, but to mix our own intentions in business, with ejaculations to heaven, and take God along with us in every motion ; but certainly it is an idolising of self when we are more diligent in our attendance on our own wit than fervent in our recourses to God.

(6.) The power of sinful self, above the efficacy of the notion of God, is evident in our workings for carnal self against the light of our own consciences. When men of sublime reason, and clear natural wisdom, are voluntary slaves to their own lusts, row against the stream of their own consciences, serve carnal self with a disgraceful and disturbing drudgery, making it their god, sacrificing natural self, all sentiments of virtue, and the quiet of their lives to the pleasure, honour, and satisfaction of carnal self,—this is a prostituting God in his deputy conscience to carnal affections, when their eyes are shut against the enlignings of it, and their ears deaf to its voice, but open to the least breath and whisper of self ; a debt that the creature owes supremely to God.

Much more might be said, but let us see what Atheism lurks in this, and how it intrencheth upon God.

1. It is a usurping God's prerogative. It is God's prerogative to be his own end, and act for his own glory, because there is nothing superior to him in excellency and goodness to act for. He had not his being from anything without himself, whereby he should be obliged to act for anything but himself. To make ourselves, then, our last end, is to co-rival God in his being, the supreme good and blessedness to himself, as if we were our own principle, the author of our own being, and were not obliged to a higher power than ourselves for what we are and have. To direct the lines of all our motions to ourselves is to imply that they first issued only from ourselves. When we are rivals to God in his chief end, we own or desire to be rivals to him in the principle of his being. This is to set ourselves in the place of God. All things have something without them, and above them as their end. All inferior creatures act for some superior order in the rank of creation ; the lesser animals are designed for the greater, and all for man. Man therefore for something nobler than himself. To make ourselves, therefore, our own end, is to deny any superior, to whom we are to direct our actions. God alone, being the supreme being, can be his own ultimate end. For if there were anything higher and better than God, the purity and righteousness of his own nature would cause him to act for and toward that as his chiefest mark. This is the highest sacrilege, to alienate the proper good and rights of God, and employ them for our own use ; to steal from him his own honour, and put it into our own cabinets, like those birds that ravished the sacrifice from the altar and carried it to their own nests.* When we love only ourselves, and act for no other end but ourselves, we invest ourselves with the dominion which is the right of God, and take the crown from his head ; for as the crown belongs to the king, so to love his own will, to will by his own will and for himself is the property of God, because he hath no other will, no other end above him to be the rule and scope of his actions.

When therefore we are by self-love transformed wholly into ourselves, we make ourselves our own foundation, without God and against God ; when we mind our own glory and praise, we would have a royal state equal with God, who ' created all things for himself,' Prov. xvi. 4. What can man do more for God than he naturally doth for himself, since he doth all those things

* Sabunde tit. 146.

for himself which he should do for God? We own ourselves to be our own creators and benefactors, and sling off all sentiments of gratitude to him.

2. It is a vilifying of God. When we make ourselves our end, it is plain language that God is not our happiness. We postpone God to ourselves, as if he were not an object so excellent and fit for our love as ourselves are (for it is irrational to make that our end which is not God, and not the chiefest good). It is to deny him to be better than we, to make him not to be so good as ourselves, and so fit to be our chiefest good as ourselves are, that he hath not deserved any such acknowledgment at our hands by all that he hath done for us. We assert ourselves his superiors by such kind of acting, though we are infinitely more inferior to God than any creature can be to us. Man cannot dishonour God more than by referring that to his own glory which God made for his own praise, upon account whereof he only hath a right to glory and praise, and none else. He thus 'changeth the glory of the incorruptible God into a corruptible image,' Rom. i. 23; a perishing fame and reputation, which extends but little beyond the limits of his own habitation, or, if it doth, survives but a few years, and perishes at last with the age wherein he lived.

3. It is as much as in us lies a destroying of God. By this temper we destroy that God that made us, because we destroy his intention and his honour. God cannot outlive his will and his glory, because he cannot have any other rule but his own will, or any other end but his own honour. The setting up self as our end puts a nullity upon the true Deity; by paying to ourselves that respect and honour which is due to God, we make the true God as no God. Whosoever makes himself a king of his prince's rights and territories, manifests an intent to throw him out of his government. To choose ourselves as our end is to undeify God, since to be the last end of a rational creature is a right inseparable from the nature of the Deity, and therefore not to set God but self always before us, is to acknowledge no being but ourselves to be God.

II. The second thing; man would make anything his end and happiness rather than God. An end is so necessary in all our actions, that he deserves not the name of a rational creature that proposeth not one to himself. This is the distinction between rational creatures and others; they act with a formal intention, whereas other creatures are directed to their end by a natural instinct, and moved by nature to what the others should be moved by reason. When a man therefore acts for that end, which was not intended him by the law of his creation, nor is suited to the noble faculties of his soul, he acts contrary to God, overturns his order, and merits no better a title than that of an atheist.

A man may be said two ways to make a thing his last end and chief good.

1. Formally. • When he actually judges this or that thing to be his chiefest good, and orders all things to it. So man doth not formally judge sin to be good, or any object which is the incentive of sin to be his last end. This cannot be while he hath the exercise of his rational faculties.

2. Virtually and implicitly. When he loves anything against the command of God, and prefers in the stream of his actions the enjoyment of that before the fruition of God, and lays out more strength and expends more time in the gaining that than answering the true end of his creation. When he acts so as if something below God could make him happy without God, or that God could not make him happy without the addition of something else. Thus the glutton makes a god of his dainties, the ambitious man of his honours, the incontinent man of his lust, and the covetous man of his wealth, and consequently esteems them as his chiefest good, and the

most noble end to which he directs his thoughts; thus he vilifies and lessens the true God, which can make him happy, in a multitude of false gods, that can only render him miserable. He that loves pleasure more than God, says in his heart there is no god but his pleasure. He that loves his belly more than God, says in his heart there is no god but his belly. Their happiness is not accounted to lie in that God that made the world, but in the pleasure or profit they make their god.

In this, though a created object be the immediate and subordinate term to which we turn, yet principally and ultimately the affection to it terminates in self; nothing is naturally entertained by us, but as it affects our sense or mingles with some promise of advantage to us.

This is seen,

1. In the fewer thoughts we have of God than of anything else. Did we apprehend God to be our chiefest good and highest end, should we grudge him the pains of a few days' thoughts upon him? Men in their travels are frequently thinking upon their intended stage; but our thoughts run upon new acquisitions to increase our wealth, rear up our families, revenge our injuries, and support our reputation. Trifles possess us, but 'God is not in all our thoughts,' Ps. x. 4, seldom the sole object of them. We have durable thoughts of transitory things, and flitting thoughts of a durable and eternal good. The covenant of grace engageth the whole heart to God, and bars anything else from engrossing it; but what strangers are God and the souls of most men! Though we have the knowledge of him by creation, yet he is for the most part an unknown God in the relations wherein he stands to us, because a God undelighted in. Hence it is, as one observes,* that because we observe not the ways of God's wisdom, conceive not of him in his vast perfections, nor are stricken with an admiration of his goodness, that we have fewer good sacred poems than of any other kind. The wits of men hang the wing when they come to exercise their reasons and fancies about God. Parts and strength are given us, as well as corn and wine to the Israelites, for the service of God, but those are consecrated to some cursed Baal, Hosea ii. 8. Like Venus in the poet, we forsake heaven to follow some Adonis.

2. In the greedy pursuit of the world.† When we pursue worldly wealth or worldly reputation with more vehemency than the riches of grace or the favour of God. When we have a foolish imagination that our happiness consists in them, we prefer earth before heaven, broken cisterns which can hold no water before an ever springing fountain of glory and bliss, and, as though there were a defect in God, cannot be content with him as our portion without an addition of something inferior to him; when we make it our hopes to say to the wedge, Thou art my confidence, and rejoice more because it is great and because our hand hath gotten much, than in the privilege of communion with God and the promise of an everlasting fruition of him, Job xxxi. 24, 25, this is so gross, that Job joins it with the idolatry of the sun and moon, which he purgeth himself of, ver. 26. And the apostle, when he mentions covetousness or covetous men, passes it not over without the title of idolatry to the vice, and idolater to the person, Col. iii. 5, Eph. v. 5, in that it is a preferring clay and dirt as an end more desirable than the original of all goodness, in regard of affection and dependence.

3. In a strong addictedness to sensual pleasures, Philip. iii. 19. Who make their belly their God, subjecting the truths of God to the maintenance of their luxury. In debasing the higher faculties to project for the satis-

* Jackson, book i. cap. 14, p. 48.

† Quod quisque præ cæteris petit, summum judicat bonum.—*Boet.* lib. 3, p. 24.

faction of the sensitive appetite as their chief happiness, whereby many render themselves no better than a rout of sublimated brutes among men, and gross atheists to God. When men's thoughts run also upon inventing new methods to satisfy their bestial appetite, forsaking the pleasures which are to be had in God, which are the delights of angels, for the satisfaction of brutes; this is an open and unquestionable refusal of God for our end, when our rest is in them, as if they were the chief good, and not God.

4. In paying a service upon any success in the world to instruments, more than to God the sovereign author. When 'they sacrifice to their net, and burn incense to their drag,' Hab. i. 16. Not that the Assyrian did offer a sacrifice to his arms, but ascribed to them what was due only to God, and appropriated the victory to his forces and arms. The prophet alludes to those that worshipped their warlike instruments, whereby they had attained great victories, and those artificers who worshipped the tools by which they had purchased great wealth in the stead of God, preferring them as the causes of their happiness before God who governs the world.

And are not our affections, upon the receiving of good things, more closely fixed to the instruments of conveyance than to the chief benefactor from whose coffers they are taken? Do we not more delight in them, and hug them with a greater endearedness, as if all our happiness depended on them, and God were no more than a bare spectator? Just as if when a man were warmed by a beam he should adore that, and not admire the sun that darts it out upon him.

5. In paying a respect to man more than God. When in a public attendance on his service, we will not laugh or be garish, because men see us; but our hearts shall be in a ridiculous posture, playing with feathers and trifling fancies, though God see us; as though our happiness consisted in the pleasing of men, and our misery in a respect to God. There is no fool that saith in his heart there is no God, but he sets up something in his heart as a god.

This is,

1. A debasing of God. (1.) In setting up a creature. It speaks God less amiable than the creature, short of those perfections which some silly sordid thing which hath engrossed their affections is possessed with; as if the cause of all being could be transcended by his creature, and a vile lust could equal, yea, surmount the loveliness of God; it is to say to God as the rich to the poor, James ii. 3, 'Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool;' it is to sink him below the mire of the world, to order him to come down from his glorious throne, and take his place below a contemptible creature, which in regard of its infinite distance is not to be compared with him. It strips God of the love that is due to him by the right of his nature and the greatness of his dignity, and of the trust that is due to him as the first cause and the chiefest good, as though he were too feeble and mean to be our blessedness. This is intolerable, to make that which is God's footstool, the earth, to climb up into his throne; to set that in our heart which God hath made even below ourselves, and put under our feet; to make that which we trample upon to dispose of the right God hath to our hearts;* it is worse than if a queen should fall in love with the little image of the prince in the palace, and slight the beauty of his person, and as if people should adore the footsteps of a king in the dirt, and turn their backs upon his presence.

(2.) It doth more debase him to set up a sin, a lust, a carnal affection, as our chief end. To steal away the honour due to God, and appropriate

* Noremberg de adorat. p. 30.

it to that which is no work of his hands, to that which is loathsome in his sight, hath disturbed his rest, and wrung out his just breath to kindle a hell for its eternal lodging, a God-dishonouring and a soul-murdering lust, is worse than to prefer Barabbas before Christ. The baser the thing, the worse is the injury to him with whom we would associate it. If it were some generous principle, a thing useful to the world, that we place in an equality with, or a superiority above him, though it were a vile usage, yet it were not altogether so criminal; but to gratify some unworthy appetite, with the displeasure of the Creator, something below the rational nature of man, much more infinitely below the excellent majesty of God, is a more unworthy usage of him. To advance one of the most virtuous nobles in a kingdom as a mark of our service and subjection, is not so dishonourable to a despised prince, as to take a scabby beggar, or a rotten carcass to place in his throne. Creeping things, abominable beasts, the Egyptian idols, cats and crocodiles, were greater abominations, and a greater despite done to God, than the image of jealousy at the gate of the altar, Ezek. viii. 5, 6, 10.

And let not any excuse themselves, that it is but one lust or one creature which is preferred as the end. Is not he an idolater that worships the sun or moon, one idol, as well as he that worships the whole host of heaven?

The inordinancy of the heart to one lust may imply a stronger contempt of him, than if a legion of lusts did possess the heart. It argues a greater disesteem when he shall be slighted for a single vanity. The depth of Esau's profaneness in contemning his birthright, and God in it, is aggravated by his selling it for 'one morsel of meat,' Heb. xii. 16, and that none of the daintiest, none of the costliest, 'a mess of pottage,' implying, had he parted with it at a greater rate, it had been more tolerable, and his profaneness more excusable. And it is reckoned as a high aggravation of the corruption of the Israelite judges, Amos ii. 6, that 'they sold the poor for a pair of shoes;' that is, that they would betray the cause of the poor for a bribe of no greater value than might purchase them a pair of shoes. To place any one thing as our chief end, though never so light, doth not excuse. He that will not stick to break with God for a trifle, a small pleasure, will leap the hedge upon a greater temptation.

Nay, and if wealth, riches, friends, and the best thing in the world, our own lives, be preferred before God, as our chief happiness and end but one moment, it is an infinite wrong, because the infinite goodness and excellency of God is denied. As though the creature or lust we love, or our own life which we prefer in that short moment before him, had a goodness in itself, superior to, and more desirable than the blessedness in God. And though it should be but one minute, and a man in all the periods of his days both before and after that failure, should actually and intentionally prefer God before all other things, yet he doth him an infinite wrong, because God in every moment is infinitely good, and absolutely desirable, and can never cease to be good, and cannot have the least shadow or change in him and his perfections.

2. It is a denying of God. Job. xxxi. 26-28, 'If I beheld the sun when it shined, and the moon walking in its brightness; and my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand, this also were iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the Lord above.' This denial of God is not only the act of an open idolater, but the consequent of a secret confidence, and immoderate joy in worldly goods; this denial of God is to be referred to, ver. 24, 25. When a man saith to gold, 'Thou art my confidence,' and rejoices because his wealth is great, he denies that God which is superior to all those, and the proper object of

trust. Both idolatries are coupled here together, that which hath wealth, and that which hath those glorious creatures in heaven for its object. And though some may think it a light sin, yet the crime being of deeper guilt, a denial of God deserves a severer punishment, and falls under the sentence of the just judge of all the earth, under that notion; which Job intimates in those words, 'this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge.'

The kissing the hand to the sun, moon, or any idol, was an external sign of religious worship among those and other nations. This is far less than an inward hearty confidence, and an affectionate trust. If the motion of the hand be, much more is the affection of the heart to an excrementitious creature, or a brutish pleasure, is a denial of God, and a kind of an abjuring of him, since the supreme affection of the soul is undoubtedly and solely the right of the sovereign creator, and not to be given in common to others, as the outward gesture may in a way of civil respect. Nothing that is an honour peculiar to God, can be given to a creature, without a plain exclusion of God to be God, it being a disowning the rectitude and excellency of his nature. If God should command a creature such a love, and such a confidence in anything inferior to him, he would deny himself his own glory, he would deny himself to be the most excellent being. Can the Romanists be free from this, when they call the cross *spem unicam*, and say to the virgin, *In te domina sperari*, as Bonaventura, &c.

Good reason therefore have worldlings and sensualists, persons of immoderate fondness to anything in the world, to reflect upon themselves; since though they own the being of a God, they are guilty of so great disrespect to him, that cannot be excused from the title of an unworthy atheism. And those that are renewed by the Spirit of God, may here see ground of a daily humiliation for the frequent and too common excursions of their souls in creature confidences and affections, whereby they fall under the charge of an act of practical atheism, though they may be free from an habit of it.

III. The third thing is, man would make himself the end of all creatures. Man would sit in the seat of God, and 'set his heart as the heart of God,' as the Lord saith of Tyrus, Ezek. xxviii. 2. What is the consequence of this, but to be esteemed the chief good and end of other creatures?—a thing that the heart of God cannot but be set upon, it being an inseparable right of the Deity, who must deny himself, if he deny this affection of the heart.

Since it is the nature of man derived from this root, to desire to be equal with God, it follows that he desires no creature should be equal with him, but subservient to his ends and his glory. He that would make himself God, would have the honour proper to God; he that thinks himself worthy of his own supreme affection, thinks himself worthy to be the object of the supreme affection of others; whosoever counts himself the chiefest good and last end, would have the same place in the thoughts of others. Nothing is more natural to man, than a desire to have his own judgment the rule and measure of the judgment and opinions of the rest of mankind. He that sets himself in the place of the prince, doth by that act challenge all the prerogatives and dues belonging to the prince; and apprehending himself fit to be a king, apprehends himself also worthy of the homage and fealty of the subjects. He that loves himself chiefly, and all other things and persons for himself, would make himself the end of all creatures. It hath not been once or twice only in the world, that some vain princes have assumed to themselves the title of gods, and caused divine adorations to be given to them, and altars to smoke with sacrifices for their honour. What hath been practised by one, is by nature seminally in all. We would have all pay an obedience to us, and give to us the esteem that is due to God.

This is evident ;—

1. In pride. When we entertain an high opinion of ourselves, and act for our own reputes, we dispossess God from our own hearts ; and while we would have our fame to be in every man's mouth, and be admired in the hearts of men, we would chase God out of the hearts of others, and deny his glory a residence anywhere else ; that our glory should reside more in their minds than the glory of God ; that their thoughts should be filled with our achievements, more than the works and excellency of God, with our image and not with the divine. Pride would paramount God in the affections of others, and juggle God out of their souls ; and by the same reason that man doth thus in the place where he lives, he would do so in the whole world, and press the whole creation from the service of their true Lord, to his own service. Every proud man would be counted by others as he counts himself, the highest, chiefest piece of goodness, and be adored by others, as much as he adores and admires himself. No proud man in his self-love, and self-admiration, thinks himself in an error ; and if he be worthy of his own admiration, he thinks himself worthy of the highest esteem of others ; that they should value him above themselves, and value themselves only for him. What did Nebuchadnezzar intend, by setting up a golden image, and commanding all his subjects to worship it, upon the highest penalty he could inflict, but that all should aim only at the pleasing his humour ?

2. In using the creatures contrary to the end God has appointed. God created the world and all things in it, as steps whereby men might ascend to a prospect of him, and the acknowledgment of his glory ; and we would use them to dishonour God, and gratify ourselves. He appointed them to supply our necessities, and support our rational delights ; and we use them to cherish our sinful lusts. We wring groans from the creature in diverting them from their true scope, to one of our own fixing, when we use them not in his service, but purely for our own, and turn those things he created for himself to be instruments of rebellion against him to serve our turns ; and hereby endeavour to defeat the ends of God in them, to establish our own ends by them. This is a high dishonour to God, a sacrilegious undermining of his glory,* to reduce what God hath made to serve our own glory, and our own pleasure ; it perverts the whole order of the world, and directs it to another end than what God hath constituted, to another intention contrary to the intention of God ; and thus man makes himself a god by his own authority. As all things were made by God, so they are for God ; but while we aspire to the end of the creation, we deny and envy God the honour of being creator. We cannot make ourselves the chief end of the creatures against God's order, but we imply thereby that we were their first principle ; for if we lived under a sense of the Creator of them while we enjoy them for our use, we should return the glory to the right owner.

3. This is diabolical ; though the devil, for his first affecting an authority in heaven, has been hurled down from the state of an angel of light, into that of darkness, vileness, and misery, to be the most accursed creature living, yet he still aspires to mate God, contrary to the knowledge of the impossibility of success in it. Neither the terrors he feels, nor the future torments he doth expect, do a jot abate his ambition to be competitor with his Creator. How often hath he, since his first sin, arrogated to himself the honour of a God from the blind world, and attempted to make the Son of God, by a particular worship, count him as the chiefest good and benefactor of the world ! Mat. iv. 9. Since all men by nature are the devil's children, the serpent's seed, they have something of this venom in their natures, as

* Sabunde Tit. 200, p. 352.

well as others of his qualities. We see that there may be, and is, a prodigious atheism lurking under the belief of a God. The devil knows there is a God, but acts like an atheist, and so do his children.

IV. Man would make himself the end of God. This necessarily follows upon the former. Whosoever makes himself his own law and his own end in the place of God, would make God the subject in making himself the sovereign. He that steps into the throne of a prince, sets the prince at his foot-stool, and while he assumes the prince's prerogative, demands a subjection from him. The order of the creation has been inverted by the entrance of sin.* God implanted an affection in man with a double aspect, the one to pitch upon God, the other to respect ourselves; but with this proviso, that our affection to God should be infinite in regard of the object, and centre in him, as the chiefest happiness and highest end; our affections to ourselves should be finite, and refer ultimately to God as the original of our being. But sin hath turned man's affections wholly to himself. Whereas he should love God first, and himself in order to God, he now loves himself first, and God in order to himself. Love to God is lost, and love to self hath usurped the throne. As God by creation 'put all things under the feet' of man, Ps. viii. 6, reserving the heart for himself, man by corruption hath dispossessed God of his heart, and put him under his own feet. We often intend ourselves when we pretend the honour of God, and make God and religion a stale to some designs we have in hand, our Creator a tool for our own ends.

This is evident,

1. In our loving God because of some self-pleasing benefits distributed by him. There is in men a kind of natural love to God; but it is but a secondary one, because God gives them the good things of this world, spreads their table, fills their cup, stuffs their coffers, and doth them some good turns by unexpected providences. This is not an affection to God for the unbounded excellency of his own nature, but for his beneficence, as he opens his hand for them; an affection to themselves, and those creatures, their gold, their honour, which their hearts are most fixed upon, without a strong spiritual inclination that God should be glorified by them in the use of those mercies. It is rather a disowning of God than any love to him, because it postpones God to those things they love him for. This would appear to be no love, if God should cease to be their benefactor, and deal with them as a judge; if he should change his outward smiles into afflicting frowns, and not only shut his hand, but strip them of what he sent them. The motive of their love being expired, the affection raised by it must cease, for want of fuel to feed it; so that God is beholden to sordid creatures of no value (but as they are his creatures) for most of the love the sons of men pretend to him. The devil spake truth of most men, though not of Job, when he said, Job i. 10, they 'love not God for nought;' but while he makes a hedge about them and their families, whilst he blesseth the works of their hands, and increaseth their honour in the land. It is like Peter's sharp reproof of his Master, when he spake of the ill usage, even to death, he was to meet with at Jerusalem, 'This shall not be unto thee.' It was as much out of love to himself as zeal for his Master's interest, knowing his Master could not be in such a storm without some drops lighting upon himself. All the apostasies of men in the world are witnesses to this. They fawn whilst they may have a prosperous profession, but will not bear one chip of the cross for the interest of God. They would partake of his blessings, but not endure the prick of a lance for him, as those that admired the

* Pascal, Pens. sec. 30. p. 294.

miracles of our Saviour, and shrunk at his sufferings. A time of trial discovers these mercenary souls to be more lovers of themselves than their Maker. This is a pretended love of friendship to God, but a real love to a lust, only to gain by God. A good man's temper is contrary. Quench hell, burn heaven, said a holy man, I will love and fear my God.

2. It is evident, in abstinence from some sins, not because they offend God, but because they are against the interest of some other beloved corruption, or a bar to something men hunt after in the world. When temperance is cherished, not to honour God, but preserve a crazy carcass; prodigality forsaken, out of a humour of avarice; uncleanness forsaken, not out of a hatred of lust, but love to their money; declining a denial of the interest and truth of God, not out of affection to them, but an ambitious zeal for their own reputation. There is a kind of conversion from sin, when God is not made the term of it: Jer. iv. 1, 'If thou wilt return, O Israel, return unto me, saith the Lord.'* When we forbear sin as dogs do the meat they love; they forbear not out of a hatred of the carrion, but fear of the cudgel. These are as wicked in their abstaining from sin as others are in their furious committing it. Nothing of the honour of God and the end of his appointments is indeed in all this, but the conveniences self gathers from them. Again, many of the motives the generality of the world uses to their friends and relations to draw them from vices are drawn from self, and used to prop up natural or sinful self in them. Come, reform yourself, take other courses, you will smut your reputation, and be despicable; you will destroy your estate, and commence a beggar; your family will be undone, and you may rot in a prison; not laying close to them the duty they owe to God, the dishonour which accrues to him by their unworthy courses, and the ingratitude to the God of their mercies. Not that the other motives are to be laid aside and slighted. Mint and cummin may be tithed, but the weightier concerns are not to be omitted. But this shews that self is the bias not only of men in their own course, but in their dealings with others. What should be subordinate to the honour of God, and the duty we owe to him, is made superior.

3. It is evident, in performing duties merely for a selfish interest; making ourselves the end of religious actions; paying a homage to that, while we pretend to render it to God: Zech. vii. 5, 'Did you at all fast unto me, even unto me?' Things ordained by God may fall in with carnal ends affected by ourselves, and then religion is not kept up by any interest of God in the conscience, but the interest of self in the heart. We then sanctify not the name of God in the duty, but gratify ourselves. God may be the object, self is the end, and a heavenly object is made subservient to a carnal design. Hypocrisy passes a compliment on God, and is called flattery: Ps. lxxviii. 36, 'They did flatter him with their lips,' &c. They gave him a parcel of good words for their own preservation. Flattery, in the old notion among the heathens, is a vice more peculiar to serve our own turn, and purvey for the belly. They knew they could not subsist without God, and therefore gave him a parcel of good words, that he might spare them, and make provision for them: 'Israel is an empty vine,' Hos. x. 1; a vine, say some, with large branches and few clusters, but 'brings forth fruit to himself,' while they professed love to God with their lips. It was that God should promote their covetous designs, and preserve their wealth and grandeur, Ezek. xxxiii. 31; in which respect an hypocrite may be well termed a religious atheist, an atheist masked with religion. The chief arguments which prevail with many men to perform some duties, and appear

* Trap. on Gen. p. 148.

religious, are the same that Hamor and Shechem used to the people of their city to submit to circumcision, viz., the engrossing of more wealth : Gen. xxxiv. 21, 22, ' If every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised, shall not their cattle and their substance, and every beast of theirs, be ours ? '

This is seen,

(1.) In unworldliness to religious duties where self is not concerned. With what lively thoughts will many approach to God when a revenue may be brought in to support their own ends ? But when the concerns of God only are in it, the duty is not the delight but the clog ; such feeble devotions that warm not the soul, unless there be something of self to give strength and heat to them. Jonah was sick of his work, and ran from God, because he thought he should get no honour by his message ; God's mercy will discredit his prophecy, Jonah iv. 2. Thoughts of disadvantage cut the very sinews of service. You may as well persuade a merchant to venture all his estate upon the inconstant waves, without hopes of gain, as prevail with a natural man to be serious in duty, without expectation of some warm advantage. ' What profit should we have if we pray to him ? ' is the natural question, Job xxi. 15. ' What profit shall I have if I be cleansed from my sin ? ' Job xxxv. 3. I shall have more good by my sin than by my service. It is for God that I dance before the ark, saith David, therefore ' I will be more vile,' 2 Sam. vi. 22. It is for self that I pray, saith a natural man, therefore I will be more warm and quick. Ordinances of God are observed only as a point of interest, and prayer is often most fervent when it is least godly, and most selfish ; carnal ends and affections will pour out lively expressions. If there be no delight in the means that lead to God, there is no delight in God himself, because love is *appetitus unionis*, a desire of union ; and where the object is desirable, the means that brings us to it would be delightful too.

(2.) In calling upon God only in a time of necessity. How officious will men be in affliction to that God whom they neglect in their prosperity ! ' When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired after God ; and they remembered that God was their rock,' Ps. lxxviii. 34. They remembered him under the scourge, and forgot him under his smiles. They visit the throne of grace, knock loud at heaven's gates, and give God no rest for their early and importunate devotions when under distress ; but when their desires are answered, and the rod removed, they stand aloof from him, and rest upon their own bottom ; as Jer. ii. 31, ' We are lords, we will come no more unto thee.' When we have need of him, he shall find us clients at his gate ; and when we have served our turn, he hears no more of us ; like Noah's dove sent out of the ark, that returned to him when she found no rest on the earth, but came not back when she found a footing elsewhere. How often do men apply themselves to God when they have some business for him to do for them ! And then, too, they are loath to put it solely into his hand, to manage it for his own honour ; but they presume to be his directors, that he may manage it for their glory. Self spurs men on to the throne of grace ; they desire to be furnished with some mercy they want, or to have the clouds of some judgments which they fear blown over. This is not affection to God, but to ourselves ; as the Romans worshipped a quartane ague as a goddess, and *Timorem et Pallorem*, fear and paleness, as gods, not out of any affection they had to the disease or the passion, but for fear to receive any hurt by them.

Again, when we have gained the mercy we need, how little do we warm our souls with the consideration of that God that gave it, or lay out the

mercy in his service ! We are importunate to have him our friend in our necessities, and are ungratefully careless of him, and his injuries he suffers by us or others. When he hath discharged us from the rock where we stuck, we leave him, as having no more need of him, and able to do well enough without him, as if we were petty gods ourselves, and only wanted a lift from him at first. This is not to glorify God as God, but as our servant ; not an honouring of God, but a self-seeking. He would hardly beg at God's door if he could pleasure himself without him.

(3.) In begging his assistance to our own projects. When we lay the plot of our own affairs, and then come to God, not for counsel but blessing, self only shall give us counsel how to act ; but because we believe there is a God that governs the world, we will desire him to contribute success. God is not consulted with till the counsel of self be fixed ; then God must be the executor of our will. Self must be the principal, and God the instrument to hatch what we have contrived. It is worse when we beg of God to favour some sinful aim ; the psalmist implies this, Ps. lxi. 18, ' If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.' Iniquity regarded as the aim in prayer renders the prayer successful, and the suppliant an atheist in debasing God to back his lust by his holy providence.

The disciples had determined revenge, and because they could not act it without their master, they would have him be their second in their vindictive passion : Luke ix. 55, ' Call for fire from heaven.'

We scarce seek God till we have modelled the whole contrivance in our own brains, and resolved upon the methods of performance, as though there were not a fulness of wisdom in God to guide us in resolves, as well as power to breathe success upon them.

(4.) In impatience upon the refusal of our desires. How often do men's spirits rise against God, when he steps not in with the assistance they want ! If the glory of God swayed more with them than their private interest, they would let God be judge of his own glory, and rather magnify his wisdom than complain of his want of goodness. Selfish hearts will charge God with neglect of them, if he be not as quick in their supplies as they are in their desires, like those in Isa. lviii. 3, ' Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not ? wherefore have we afflicted our souls, and thou takest no knowledge ?' When we aim at God's glory in our importunities, we shall fall down in humble submissions when he denies us ; whereas self riseth up in bold expostulations, as if God were our servant, and had neglected the service he owed us, not to come at our call. We over-value the satisfactions of self above the honour of God. Besides, if what we desire be a sin, our impatience at a refusal is more intolerable. It is an anger, that God will not lay aside his holiness to serve our corruption.

5. In the actual aims men have in their duties. In prayer for temporal things, when we desire health for our own ease, wealth for our own sensuality, strength for our revenge, children for the increase of our family, gifts for our applause, as Simon Magus did the Holy Ghost, or when some of those ends are aimed at, this is to desire God not to serve himself of us, but to be a servant to our worldly interest, our vain glory, the greatening of our names, &c. In spiritual mercies begged for, when pardon of sin is desired only for our own security from eternal vengeance ; sanctification desired only to make us fit for everlasting blessedness ; peace of conscience only that we may lead our lives more comfortably in the world ; when we have not actual intentions for the glory of God, or when our thoughts of God's honour are overtopped by the aims of self-advantage. Not but that as God hath pressed us to those things by motives drawn from the blessedness

derived to ourselves by them, so we may desire them with a respect to ourselves ; but this respect must be contained within the due banks, in subordination to the glory of God, not above it, nor in an equal balance with it.* That which is nourishing or medicinal in the first or second degree, is in the fourth or fifth degree mere destructive poison.

Let us consider it seriously ; though a duty be heavenly, doth not some base end smut us in it ?

[1.] How is it with our confessions of sin ? Are they not more to procure our pardon than to shame ourselves before God, or to be freed from the chains that hinder us from bringing him the glory for which we were created ; or more to partake of his benefits than to honour him in acknowledging the rights of his justice ? Do we not bewail sin as it hath ruined us, not as it opposed the holiness of God ? Do we not shuffle with God, and confess our † sin, while we reserve another, as if we would allure God, by declaring our dislike of one, to give us liberty to commit wantonness with another ; not to abhor ourselves, but to daub with God ?

[2.] Is it any better in our private and family worship ? Are not such assemblies frequented by some, when some upon whom they have a dependence may eye them, and have a better opinion of them and affection to them ? If God were the sole end of our hearts, would they not be as glowing under the sole eye of God as our tongues or carriages are seemingly serious under the eye of man ? Are not family duties performed by some that their voices may be heard, and their reputation supported among godly neighbours ?

[3.] Is not the charity of many men tainted with this end, self ? Mat. vi. 1, as the Pharisees were while they set the miserable object before them, but not the Lord, bestowing alms, not so much upon the necessities of the people, as the friendship we owe them for some particular respects ; or casting our bread upon those waters which stream down in the sight of the world, that our doles may be visible to them and commended by them ; or when we think to oblige God to pardon our transgressions, as if we merited it and heaven too at his hands, by bestowing a few pence upon indigent persons. And,

[4.] Is it not the same with the reproofs of men ? Is not heat and anger carried out with full sail when our worldly interest is prejudiced, and becalmed in the concerns of God ? Do not masters reprove their servants with more vehemency, for the neglect of their trade and business, than the neglect of divine duties, and that upon religious arguments, pretending the honour of God, that they may mind their own interest ? But when they are negligent in what they owe to God no noise is made, they pass without rebuke. Is not this to make God and religion a stale to their own ends ? It is a part of atheism, not to regard the injuries done to God, as Tiberius.† Let God's wrongs be looked to, or cared for by himself.

[5.] Is it not thus in our seeming zeal for religion ? As Demetrius and the craftsmen at Ephesus cried up aloud the greatness of Diana of the Ephesians, not out of any true zeal they had for her, but their gain, which was increased by the confluence of her worshippers, and the sale of her own shrines, Acts xix. 24, 28.

[6.] In making use of the name of God to countenance our sin. When we set up an opinion that is a friend to our lusts, and then dig deep into the Scripture to find crutches to support it, and authorise our practices ; when

* Gurnall, part iii. p. 337.

† Dei injuria Deo curæ.

† Qu. 'one' ?—ED.

men will thank God for what they have got by unlawful means, fathering the fruit of their cheating craft, and the simplicity of their chapmen upon God; crediting their cozenage by his name, as men do brass money, with a thin plate of silver and the stamp and image of the prince. The Jews urge the law of God for the crucifying his Son: John xix. 7, 'We have a law, and by that law he is to die;' and would make him a party in their private revenge.* Thus often when we have faltered in some actions we wipe our mouths, as if we sought God more than our own interest, prostituting the sacred name and honour of God, either to hatch or defend some unworthy lust against his word.

Is not all this a high degree of atheism?

1. It is a villifying God, an abuse of the highest good. Other sins subject the creature and outward things to them; but acting in religious services for self subjects not only the highest concerns of men's souls, but the Creator himself to the creature, nay, to make God contribute to that which is the pleasure of the devil; a greater slight than to cast the gifts of a prince to a herd of nasty swine. It were more excusable to serve ourselves of God upon the higher accounts, such that materially conduced to his glory, but it is an intolerable wrong to make him and his ordinances caterers for our own bellies, as they did, Hosea viii. 13.† They sacrificed the **הבהים** of which the offerer might eat, not of out of any reference to God, but love to their gluttony; not please him, but feast themselves. The belly was truly made the god, when God was served only in order to the belly: as though the blessed God had his being, and his ordinances were enjoined to pleasure their foolish and wanton appetites; as though the work of God were only to patronise unrighteous ends, and be as bad as themselves, and become a pander to their corrupt affections.

2. Because it is a vilifying of God, it is an undeifying or dethroning God. It is an acting as if we were the lords, and God our vassal; a setting up those secular ends in the place of God, who ought to be our ultimate end in every action; to whom a glory is as due as his mercy to us is utterly unmerited by us. He that thinks to cheat and put the fool upon God by his pretences, doth not heartily believe there is such a being. He could not have the notion of a God without that of omniscience and justice; an eye to see the cheat, and an arm to punish it. The notion of the one would direct him in the manner of his services, and the sense of the other would scare him from the cherishing his unworthy ends. He that serves God with a sole respect to himself is prepared for any idolatry; his religion shall warp with the times and his interest; he shall deny the true God for an idol, when his worldly interest shall advise him to it, and pay the same reverence to the basest image which he pretends now to pay to God; as the Israelites were as real for idolatry under their basest princes as they were pretenders to the true religion under those that were pious.

Before I come to the use of this, give me leave to evince this practical atheism by two other considerations.

1. Unworthy imaginations of God.

'The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God;' that is, he is not such a God as you report him to be; this is meant by their being corrupt, in the second verse corrupt being taken for playing the idolaters, Exod. xxxii. 7. We cannot comprehend God; if we could, we should cease to be finite; and because we cannot comprehend him, we erect strange images of him in our fancies and affections. And since guilt came upon us, because we cannot root out the notions of God, we would debase the majesty and

* Sanderson's Sermons, part ii. p. 158.

† Vid. Cocc. *in locum*.

nature of God, that we may have some ease in our consciences, and lie down with some comfort in the sparks of our own kindling.

This is universal in men by nature. 'God is not in all his thoughts,' Ps. x. 4. Not in any of his thoughts, according to the excellency of his nature, and greatness of his majesty. As the heathen did not glorify God as God, so neither do they conceive of God as God. They are all infected with some one or other ill opinion of him, thinking him not so holy, powerful, just, good as he is, and as the natural force of a human understanding might arrive to. We join a new notion of God in our vain fancies, and represent him not as he is, but as we would have him to be, fit for our own use, and suited to our own pleasure. We set that active power of imagination on work, and there comes out a god (a calf), whom we own for a notion of God.

Adam cast him into so narrow a mould as to think that himself, who had newly sprouted up by his almighty power, was fit to be his corival in knowledge, and had vain hopes to grasp as much as infiniteness. If he in his first declining began to have such a conceit, it is no doubt but we have as bad under a mass of corruption. When holy Agur speaks of God, he cries out that he had not 'the understanding of a man, nor the knowledge of the holy,' Prov. xxx. 2, 3. He did not think rationally of God as man might by his strength at his first creation. There are as many carved images of God as there are minds of men, and as monstrous shapes as those corruptions into which they would transform him.

Hence sprang,

1. Idolatry. Vain imaginations first set afloat and kept up this in the world. Vain imaginations of the God 'whose glory they changed into the image of corruptible man,' Rom. i. 21, 23. They had set up vain images of him in their fancy, before they set up idolatrous representations of him in their temples; the likening him to those idols of wood and stone, and various metals, were the fruit of an idea erected in their own minds. This is a mighty debasing the divine nature, and rendering him no better than that base and stupid matter they make the visible object of their adoration, equalling him with those base creatures they think worthy to be the representations of him. Yet how far did this crime spread itself in all corners of the world, not only among the more barbarous and ignorant, but the more polished and civilized nations! Judea only, where God had placed the ark of his presence, being free from it in some intervals of time only, after some sweeping judgment. And though they vomited up their idols under some sharp scourge, they licked them up again after the heavens were cleared over their heads. The whole book of Judges makes mention of it. And though an evangelical light hath chased that idolatry away from a great part of the world, yet the principle remaining, coins more spiritual idols in the heart, which are brought before God in acts of worship.

2. Hence all superstition received its rise and growth. When we mint a God according to our own complexion, like to us in mutable and various passions, soon angry and soon appeased, it is no wonder that we invent ways of pleasing him after we have offended him, and think to expiate the sin of our souls by some melancholy devotions and self-chastisements. Superstition is nothing else but an unscriptural and unrevealed dread of God, *Δεσποδαιμονία*. When they imagine him a rigorous, and severe master, they cast about for ways to mitigate him whom they thought so hard to be pleased. A very mean thought of him, as if a slight and pompous devotion could as easily bribe and flatter him out of his rigours, as a few good words or babbling rattles could please and quiet little children, and whatsoever

pleased us could please a God infinitely above us. Such narrow conceits had the Philistines, when they thought to still the anger of the God of Israel, whom they thought they possessed in the ark, with the present of a few golden mice, 1 Sam. vi. 3, 4. All the superstition this day living in the world is built upon this foundation; so natural it is to man to pull God down to his own imaginations, rather than raise up his imaginations up to God. Hence doth arise also the diffidence of his mercy, though they repent, measuring God by the contracted models of their own spirits, as though his nature were as difficult to pardon their offences against him, as they are to remit wrongs done to themselves.

3. Hence springs all presumption, the common disease of the world. All the wickedness in the world, which is nothing else but presuming upon God, rises from the ill interpretations of the goodness of God, breaking out upon them in the works of creation and providence. The corruption of man's nature engendered by those notions of goodness a monstrous birth of vain imaginations, not of themselves primarily, but of God; whence arose all that folly and darkness in their minds and conversations: Rom. i. 20, 21, 'They glorified him not as God,' but according to themselves imagined him good that themselves might be bad, fancied him so indulgent as to neglect his honour for their sensuality. How doth the unclean person represent him to his own thoughts but as a goat, the murderer as a tiger, the sensual person as a swine, while they fancy a god indulgent to their crimes without their repentance! As the image on the seal is stamped upon the wax, so the thoughts of the heart are printed upon the actions. God's patience is apprehended to be an approbation of their vices, and from the consideration of his forbearance they fashion a god that they believe will smile upon their crimes; they imagine a god that plays with them, and though he threatens, doth it only to scare, but means not as he speaks; a god they fancy like themselves, that would do as they would do, not be angry for what they count a light offence: Ps. l. 21, 'Thou thoughtest I was such a one as thyself;' that God and they were exactly alike, as two tallies. 'Our wilful misapprehensions of God are the cause of our misbehaviour in all his worship; our slovenly and lazy services tell him to his face what slight thoughts and apprehensions we have of him.'*

. Compare these two together.

Superstition ariseth from terrifying misapprehensions of God; presumption from self-pleasing thoughts. One represents him only rigorous, and the other careless; one makes us over-officious in serving him by our own rules, and the other over-bold in offending him according to our humours. The want of a true notion of God's justice makes some men slight him; and the want of a true apprehension of his goodness makes others too servile in their approaches to him. One makes us careless of duties, and the other makes us look on them rather as physic than food; an unsupportable penance than a desirable privilege. In this case hell is the principle of duty performed to heaven. The superstitious man believes God hath scarce mercy to pardon; the presumptuous man believes he hath no such perfection as justice to punish. The one makes him insignificant to what he desires, kindness and goodness; the other renders him insignificant to what he fears, his vindictive justice. What between the idolater, the superstitious, the presumptuous person, God should look like no God in the world.

These unworthy imaginations of God are likewise,

A villifying of him, debasing the Creator to be a creature of their own

* Gurnal, part ii. p. 245, 246.

fancies, putting their own stamp upon him, and fashioning him not according to that beautiful image he impressed upon them by creation, but the defaced image they inherit by their fall, and which is worse, the image of the devil which spread itself over them at their revolt and apostasy. Were it possible to see a picture of God, according to the fancies of men, it would be the most monstrous being, such a god that never was, nor ever can be.

We honour God when we have worthy opinions of him suitable to his nature ; when we conceive of him as a being of unbounded loveliness and perfection. We detract from him when we ascribe to him such qualities as would be a horrible disgrace to a wise and good man, as injustice and impurity. Thus men debase God when they invert his order, and would create him according to their image, as he first created them according to his own ; and think him not worthy to be a God, unless he fully answer the mould they would cast him into, and be what is unworthy of his nature. Men do not conceive of God as he would have them, but he must be what they would have him, one of their own shaping.

(1.) This is worse than idolatry. The grossest idolater commits not a crime so heinous, by changing his glory into the image of creeping things and senseless creatures, as the imagining God to be as one of our sinful selves, and likening him to those filthy images we erect in our fancies ; one makes him an earthly God, like an earthly creature ; the other fancies him an unjust and impure God, like a wicked creature : one sets up an image of him in the earth, which is his footstool ; the other sets up an image of him in the heart, which ought to be his throne.

(2.) It is worse than absolute atheism or a denial of God. *Dignius credimus non esse, quodcumque non ita fuerit, ut esse debebit*, was the opinion of Tertullian.* It is more commendable to think him not to be, than to think him such a one as is inconsistent with his nature. Better to deny his existence than to deny his perfection. No wise man but would rather have his memory rot than be accounted infamous, and would be more obliged to him that should deny that ever he had a being in the world, than to say he did indeed live, but he was a sot, a debauched person, and a man not to be trusted. When we apprehend God deceitful in his promises, unrighteous in his threatenings, unwilling to pardon upon repentance, or resolved to pardon notwithstanding impenitency, these are things either unworthy of the nature of God, or contrary to that revelation he hath given of himself. Better for a man never to have been born than be for ever miserable ; so better to be thought no God than represented impotent or negligent, unjust or deceitful, which are more contrary to the nature of God than hell can be to the greatest criminal. In this sense perhaps the apostle affirms the Gentiles, Eph. ii. 12, to be such as are 'without God in the world,' as being more atheists in adoring God under such notions as they commonly did, than if they had acknowledged no God at all.†

2. This is evident by our natural desire to be distant from him, and unwillingness to have any acquaintance with him. Sin set us first at a distance from God ; and every new act of gross sin estrangeth us more from him, and indisposeth us more for him : it makes us both afraid and ashamed to be near him. Sensual men were of this frame that Job discourseth of : Job xxi. 7-9, and 14, 15. Where grace reigns, the nearer to God, the more vigorous the motion ; the nearer anything approaches to us that is the object of our desires, the more eagerly do we press forward to it ; but our blood riseth at the approaches of anything to which we have an aversion. We

* Tertul. cont. Marcion, lib. i. cap. 2.

have naturally a loathing of God's coming to us, or our return to him; we seek not after him as our happiness; and when he offers himself, we like it not, but put a disgrace upon him in choosing other things before him. God and we are naturally at as great a distance as light and darkness, life and death, heaven and hell. The stronger impression of God anything hath, the more we fly from it. The glory of God in reflection upon Moses his face scared the Israelites; they who desired God to speak to them by Moses, when they saw a signal impression of God upon his countenance, were afraid to come near him, as they were before unwilling to come near to God, *Exod.* xxxiv. 30. Not that the blessed God is in his own nature a frightful object, but our own guilt renders him so to us, and ourselves indisposed to converse with him; as the light of the sun is as irksome to a distempered eye as it is in its own nature desirable to a sound one. The saints themselves have had so much frailty, that they have cried out that they were undone, if they had any more than ordinary discoveries of a God made unto them; as if they wished him more remote from them. Vileness cannot endure the splendour of majesty, nor guilt the glory of a judge.

We have naturally, (1.) No desire of remembrance of him; (2.) or converse with him; (3.) or thorough return to him; (4.) or close imitation of him: as if there were not such being as God in the world; or as if we wished there were none at all; so feeble and spiritless are our thoughts of the being of a God.

(1.) No desire for the remembrance of him. How delightful are other things in our minds! How burdensome the memorials of God, from whom we have our being! With what pleasure do we contemplate the nature of creatures, even of flies and toads; while our minds tire in the search of him who hath bestowed upon us our knowing and meditating faculties! Though God shews himself to us in every creature, in the meanest weed as well as in the highest heavens, and is more apparent in them to our reasons than themselves can be to our sense, yet though we see them, we will not behold God in them. We will view them to please our sense, to improve our reason in their natural perfections; but pass by the consideration of God's perfections so visibly beaming from them. Thus we play the beasts and atheists in the very exercise of reason, and neglect our Creator to gratify our sense; as though the pleasure of that were more desirable than the knowledge of God. The desire of our souls is not 'towards his name and the remembrance of him,' *Isa.* xxvi. 8, when we set not ourselves in a posture to feast our souls with deep and serious meditations of him; have a thought of him only by the by and away, as if we were afraid of too intimate acquaintance with him.

Are not the thoughts of God rather our invaders than our guests, seldom invited to reside and take up their home in our hearts? Have we not, when they have broken in upon us, bid them 'depart from us,' *Job* xxii. 17, and warned them to come no more upon our ground; sent them packing as soon as we could, and were glad when they were gone? And when they have departed, have we not often been afraid they should return again upon us, and therefore looked about for other inmates, things not good; or if good, infinitely below God, to possess the room of our hearts before any thoughts of him should appear again? Have we not often been glad of excuses to shake off present thoughts of him; and when we have wanted real ones, found out pretences to keep God and our hearts at a distance? Is not this a part of atheism, to be so unwilling to employ our faculties about the giver of them, to refuse to exercise them in a way of grateful remembrance of him, as though they were none of his gift, but our own acquisition;

as though the God that truly gave them had no right to them, and he that thinks on us every day in a way of providence, were not worthy to be thought on by us in a way of special remembrance?

Do not the best, that love the remembrance of him, and abhor this natural averseness, find that when they would think of God, many things tempt them and turn them to think elsewhere? Do they not find their apprehensions too feeble, their motions too dull, and the impressions too slight? This natural atheism is spread over human nature.

(2.) No desire of converse with him. The word *remember*, in the command for keeping holy the Sabbath-day, including all the duties of the day, and the choicest of our lives, implies our natural unwillingness to them, and forgetfulness of them. God's pressing this command with more reasons than the rest, manifests that man hath no heart for spiritual duties. No spiritual duty, which sets us immediately face to face with God, but in the attempts of it we find naturally a resistance from some powerful principle; so that every one may subscribe to the speech of the apostle, that 'when we would do good, evil is present with us.' No reason of this can be rendered but the natural temper of our souls, and an affecting a distance from God under any consideration; for though our guilt first made the breach, yet this aversion to a converse with him steps up without any actual reflections upon our guilt, which may render God terrible to us as an offended judge. Are we not also, in our attendance upon him, more pleased with the modes of worship which gratify our fancy, than to have our souls inwardly delighted with the object of worship himself?

This is a part of our natural atheism. To cast such duties off by total neglect, or in part, by affecting a coldness in them, is to cast off the fear of the Lord, Job xv. 4. Not to call upon God, and not to know him, are one and the same thing, Jer. x. 25. Either we think there is no such being in the world, or that he is so slight a one, that he deserves not the respect he calls for; or so impotent and poor, that he cannot supply what our necessities require.

(3.) No desire of a thorough return to him. The first man fled from him after his defection, though he had no refuge to fly to but the grace of his Creator. Cain went from his presence, would be a fugitive from God, rather than a suppliant to him; when by faith in, and application of the promised Redeemer, he might have escaped the wrath to come for his brother's blood, and mitigated the sorrows he was justly sentenced to bear in the world. Nothing will separate prodigal man from communing with swine, and make him return to his father, but an empty trough; have we but husks to feed on, we shall never think of a father's presence. It were well if our sores and indigence would drive us to him; but when our 'strength is devoured,' we will not 'return to the Lord our God, nor seek him for all this,' Hosea vii. 10. Not his drawn sword as a God of judgment, nor his mighty power as a Lord, nor his open arms as the Lord their God, could move them to turn their eyes and their hearts towards him. The more he invites us to partake of his grace, the further we run from him to provoke his wrath: the louder God called them by his prophets, the closer they stuck to their Baal, Hosea xi. 2. We turn our backs when he stretches out his hand, stop our ears when he lifts up his voice; we fly from him when he courts us, and shelter ourselves in any bush from his merciful hand, that would lay hold upon us; nor will we set our faces towards him, till our 'way be hedged up with thorns,' and not a gap left to creep out any by-way, Hosea ii. 6, 7. Whosoever is brought to a return, puts the Holy Ghost to the pain of striving; he is not easily brought to a spiritual subjection to God, nor persuaded to a surrender

at a summons, but sweetly overpowered by storm, and victoriously drawn into the arms of God. God stands ready, but the heart stands off; grace is full of entreaties, and the soul full of excuses; divine love offers, and carnal self-love rejects. Nothing so pleases us, as when we are furthest from him; as if anything were more amiable, anything more desirable than himself.

(4.) No desire of any close imitation of him. When our Saviour was to come as a refiner's fire to purify the sons of Levi, the cry is, 'Who shall abide the day of his coming?' Mal. iii. 2, 3. Since we are alienated from the life of God, we desire no more naturally to live the life of God, than a toad or any other animal desires to live the life of a man. No heart that knows God but hath a holy ambition to imitate him; no soul that refuseth him for a copy, but is ignorant of his excellency; of this temper is all mankind naturally. Man in corruption is as loath to be like God in holiness, as Adam after his creation was desirous to be like God in knowledge; his posterity are like their father, who soon turned his back upon his original copy.

What can be worse than this? Can the denial of his being be a greater injury than this contempt of him; as if he had not goodness to deserve our remembrance, nor amiableness fit for our converse; as if he were not a Lord fit for our subjection, nor had a holiness that deserved our imitation?

IV. For the use of this. It serves,

1. For information.

(1.) It gives us occasion to admire the wonderful patience and mercy of God. How many millions of practical atheists breathe every day in his air, and live upon his bounty, who deserve to be inhabitants in hell, rather than possessors of the earth! An infinite holiness is offended, an infinite justice is provoked; yet an infinite patience forbears the punishment, and an infinite goodness relieves our wants. The more we had merited his justice and forfeited his favour, the more is his affection enhanced, which makes his hand so liberal to us.

At the first invasion of his rights, he mitigates the terror of the threatening, which was set to defend his law, with the grace of a promise to relieve and recover his rebellious creature, Gen. iii. 15. Who would have looked for anything but tearing thunders, sweeping judgments, to rase up the foundations of the apostate world? But oh, how great are his bowels to his aspiring competitors! Have we not experimented his contrivances for our good, though we have refused him for our happiness? Has he not opened his arms, when we spurned with our feet; held out his alluring mercy, when we have brandished against him a rebellious sword? Has he not entreated us while we have invaded him, as if he were unwilling to lose us, who are ambitious to destroy ourselves? Has he yet denied us the care of his providence, while we have denied him the rights of his honour, and would appropriate them to ourselves? Has the sun forborne shining upon us, though we have shot our arrows against him? Have not our beings been supported by his goodness, while we have endeavoured to climb up to his throne; and his mercies continued to charm us, while we have used them as weapons to injure him? Our own necessities might excite us to own him as our happiness, but he adds his invitations to the voice of our wants. Has he not promised a kingdom to those that would strip him of his crown, and proclaimed pardon, upon repentance, to those that would take away his glory? and hath so twisted together his own end, which is his honour, and man's true end, which is his salvation, that a man cannot truly mind himself and his own salvation, but he must mind God's glory; and cannot be intent upon God's honour but by the same act he promotes himself and

his own happiness ; so loath is God to give any just occasion of dissatisfaction to his creature, as well as dishonour himself. All those wonders of his mercy are enhanced by the heinousness of our atheism, a multitude of gracious thoughts from him above the multitude of contempts from us, Ps. cvi. 7. - What rebels in actual arms against their prince, aiming at his life, ever found that favour from him, to have all their necessities richly afforded them, without which they would starve, and without which they would be unable to manage their attempts, as we have received from God ? Had not God had ' riches of goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering,' and infinite riches too, the despite the world had done him in refusing him as their rule, happiness, and end, would have emptied him long ago, Rom. ii. 4.

(2.) It brings in a justification of the exercise of his justice. If it gives us occasion loudly to praise his patience, it also stops our mouths from accusing any acts of his vengeance. What can be too sharp a recompence for the despising and disgracing so great a being ? The highest contempt merits the greatest anger, and when we will not own him for our happiness, it is equal we should feel the misery of separation from him. If he that is guilty of treason deserves to lose his life, what punishment can be thought great enough for him that is so disingenuous as to prefer himself before a God so infinitely good, and so foolish as to invade the rights of one infinitely powerful ? It is no injustice for a creature to be for ever left to himself, to see what advantage he can make of that self he was so busily employed to set up in the place of his Creator. The soul of man deserves an infinite punishment for despising an infinite good. And is it not unequitable that that self, which man makes his rule and happiness above God, should become his torment and misery by the righteousness of that God whom he despised.

(3.) Hence ariseth a necessity of a new state and frame of soul, to alter an atheistical nature. We forget God, think of him with reluctancy, have no respect to God in our course and acts. This cannot be our original state. God being infinitely good, never let man come out of his hands with this actual unwillingness to acknowledge and serve him. He never intended to dethrone himself for the work of his hands, or that the creature should have any other end than that of his Creator. As the apostle saith in the case of the Galatians' error, Gal. v. 8, ' This persuasion came not of him that called you,' so this frame comes not from him that created you. How much, therefore, do we need a restoring principle in us ! Instead of ordering ourselves according to the will of God, we are desirous to ' fulfil the wills of the flesh,' Eph. ii. 3. There is a necessity of some other principle in us to make us fulfil the will of God, since we were created for God, not for the flesh.

We can no more be voluntarily serviceable to God while our serpentine nature and devilish habits remain in us, than we can suppose the devil can be willing to glorify God while the nature he contracted by his fall abides powerfully in him. Our nature and will must be changed, that our actions may regard God as our end, that we may delightfully meditate on him, and draw the motives of our obedience from him. Since this atheism is seated in nature, the change must be in our nature. Since our first aspirings to the rights of God were the fruits of the serpent's breath, which tainted our nature, there must be a removal of this taint, whereby our natures may be on the side of God against Satan, as they were before on the side of Satan against God. There must be a supernatural principle before we can live a supernatural life, *i.e.*, live to God, since we are naturally alienated from the life of God.' The aversion of our natures from God is as strong as our

inclinations to evil; we are disgusted with one, and pressed with the other; we have no will, no heart to come to God in any service. This nature must be broken in pieces, and new moulded, before we can make God our rule and our end. While men's deeds are evil, they cannot comply with God, John iii. 19, 20, much less while their natures are evil. Till this be done, all the service a man performs riseth from some evil imagination of the heart, which is evil, only evil, and that continually, Gen. vi. 5, from wrong notions of God, wrong notions of duty, or corrupt motives. All the pretences of devotion to God are but the adoration of some golden image. Prayers to God for the ends of self, are like those of the devil to our Saviour, when he asked leave to go into the herd of swine. The object was right, Christ; the end was the destruction of the swine, and the satisfaction of their malice to the owners. There is a necessity, then, that depraved ends should be removed, that that which was God's end in our framing may be our end in our acting, viz., his glory, which cannot be without a change of nature. We can never honour him supremely whom we do not supremely love. Till this be, we cannot glorify God as God, though we do things by his command and order, no more than when God employed the devil in afflicting Job, chap. i. His performance cannot be said to be good, because his end was not the same with God's. He acted out of malice what God commanded out of sovereignty, and for gracious designs. Had God employed an holy angel in his design upon Job, the action had been good in the affliction, because his nature was holy, and therefore his ends holy; but bad in the devil, because his ends were base and unworthy.

(4.) We may gather from hence the difficulty of conversion, and mortification to follow thereupon. What is the reason men receive no more impression from the voice of God and the light of his truth, than a dead man in the grave doth from the roaring thunder, or a blind mole from the light of the sun? It is because our atheism is as great as the deadness of the one or the blindness of the other. The principle in the heart is strong to shut the door both of the thoughts and affections against God. If a friend oblige us, we shall act for him as for ourselves. We are won by entreaties; soft words overcome us; but our hearts are as deaf as the hardest rock at the call of God. Neither the joys of heaven proposed by him can allure us, nor the flashed terrors of hell affright us to him; as if we conceived God unable to bestow the one or execute the other. The true reason is, God and self contest for the deity. The law of sin is, God must be at the foot-stool; the law of God is, sin must be utterly deposed. Now it is difficult to leave a law beloved for a law long ago discarded. The mind of man will hunt after anything, the will of man embrace anything; upon the proposal of mean objects, the spirit of man spreads its wings, flies to catch them, becomes one with them; but attempt to bring it under the power of God, the wings flag, the creature looks lifeless, as though there were no spring of motion in it. It is as much crucified to God as the holy apostle was to the world. The sin of the heart discovers its strength the more God discovers the holiness of his will, Rom. vii. 9-12. The love of sin hath been predominant in our nature, has quashed a love to God, if not extinguished it.

Hence also is the difficulty of mortification. This is a work tending to the honour of God, the abasing of that inordinately aspiring humour in ourselves. If the nature of man be inclined to sin, as it is, it must needs be bent against anything that opposes it. It is impossible to strike any true blow at any lust, till the true sense of God be re-entertained in the soil where it ought to grow. Who can be naturally willing to crucify what is incorporated with him, his flesh; what is dearest to him, himself? Is it an

easy thing for man, the competitor with God, to turn his arms against himself, that self should overthrow its own empire, lay aside all its pretensions to and designs for a godhead; to hew off its own members and subdue its own affections? It is the nature of man to cover his sin, to hide it in his bosom,—Job xxxi. 33, 'If I cover my transgression, as Adam,'—not to destroy it, and as unwillingly part with his carnal affections as the legion of devils were with the man that had been long possessed. And when he is forced and fired from one, he will endeavour to espouse some other lust, as those devils desired to possess swine, when they were chased from their possession of that man.

(5.) Here we see the reason of unbelief. That which hath most of God in it meets with most aversion from us; that which hath least of God finds better and stronger inclinations in us. What is the reason that the heart of man is more unwilling to embrace the gospel than acknowledge the equity of the law? Because there is more of God's nature and perfection evident in the gospel than in the law; besides, there is more reliance on God and distance from self commanded in the gospel. The law puts a man upon his own strength, the gospel takes him off from his own bottom. The law acknowledges him to have a power in himself, and to act for his own reward; the gospel strips him of all his proud and towering thoughts, 2 Cor. x. 5, brings him to his due place, the foot of God, orders him to deny himself as his own rule, righteousness, and end, and henceforth not to live to himself, 2 Cor. v. 15. This is the true reason why men are more against the gospel than against the law, because it doth more deify God and debase man. Hence it is easier to reduce men to some moral virtue than to faith; to make men blush at their outward vices, but not at the inward impurity of their natures. Hence it is observed that those that assert that all happiness did arise from something in a man's self, as the Stoics and Epicureans did, and that a wise man was equal with God, were greater enemies to the truths of the gospel than others, Acts xvii. 18, because it lays the axe to the root of their principal opinion; takes the one from their self-sufficiency, and the other from their self-gratification. It opposeth the brutish principle of the one, which placed happiness in the pleasures of the body, and the more noble principle of the other, which placed happiness in the virtue of the mind. The one was for a sensual, the other for a moral self, both disowned by the doctrine of the gospel.

(6.) It informs us, consequently, who can be the author of grace and conversion, and every other good work. No practical atheist ever yet turned to God but was turned by God; and not to acknowledge it to God is a part of this atheism, since it is a robbing God of the honour of one of his most glorious works. If this practical atheism be natural to man ever since the first taint of nature in paradise, what can be expected from it but a resisting of the work of God, and setting up all the forces of nature against the operations of grace, till a day of power dawn and clear up upon the soul? Ps. ex. 3. Not all the angels in heaven, or men upon earth, can be imagined to be able to persuade a man to fall out with himself; nothing can turn the tide of nature, but a power above nature. God took away the sanctifying Spirit from man, as a penalty for the first sin; who can regain it but by his will and pleasure? Who can restore it but he that removed it? Since every man hath the same fundamental atheism in him by nature, and would be a rule to himself, and his own end, he is so far from dethroning himself that all the strength of his corrupted nature is alarmed up to stand to their arms, upon any attempt God makes to regain the fort. The will is so strong against God, that it is like many wills twisted together: Eph. ii. 3,

'wills of the flesh,' we translate it the 'desires of the flesh.' Like many threads twisted in a cable, never to be snapped asunder by a human arm, a power and will above ours can only untwist so many wills in a knot. Man cannot rise to an acknowledgment of God without God. Hell may as well become heaven, the devil be changed into an angel of light. The devil cannot but desire happiness, he knows the misery into which he is fallen; he cannot be desirous of that punishment he knows is reserved for him. Why doth he not sanctify God and glorify his Creator, wherein there is abundantly more pleasure than in his malicious course? Why doth he not petition to recover his ancient standing? He will not, there are chains of darkness upon his faculties; he will not be otherwise than he is. His desire to be god of the world sways him against his own interest, and out of love to his malice he will not sin at a less rate to make a diminution of his punishment. Man, if God utterly refuseth to work upon him, is no better, and to maintain his atheism would venture a hell. How is it possible for a man to turn himself to that God, against whom he hath a quarrel in his nature, the most rooted and settled habit in him being to set himself in the place of God? An atheist by nature can no more alter his own temper, and engrave in himself the divine nature, than a rock can carve itself into the statue of a man, or a serpent, that is an enemy to man, could or would raise itself to the nobility of the human nature. That soul that by nature would strip God of his rights, cannot, without a divine power, be made conformable to him, and acknowledge sincerely and cordially the rights and glory of God.

(7.) We may here see the reason why there can be no justification by the best and strongest works of nature. Can that which hath atheism at the root justify either the action or person? What strength can those works have which have neither God's law for their rule, nor his glory for their end, that are not wrought by any spiritual strength for him, nor tend with any spiritual affection to him? Can these be a foundation for the most holy God to pronounce a creature righteous? They will justify his justice in condemning, but cannot sway his justice to an absolution. Every natural man in his works picks and chooses; he owns the will of God no further than he can wring it to suit the law of his members, and minds not the honour of God, but as it justles not with his own glory and secular ends. Can he be righteous that prefers his own will and his own honour before the will and honour of the Creator? However men's actions may be beneficial to others, what reason hath God to esteem them, wherein there is no respect to him but themselves, whereby they dethrone him in their thoughts, while they seem to own him in their religious works? Every day reproves us with something different from the rule, thousands of wanderings offer themselves to our eyes. Can justification be expected from that which in itself is matter of despair?

(8.) See here the cause of all the apostasy in the world. Practical atheism was never conquered in such, they are still 'alienated from the life of God,' and will not live to God, as he lives to himself and his own honour, Eph. iv. 17, 18. They loathe his rule and distaste his glory; are loath to step out of themselves to promote the ends of another; find not the satisfaction in him as they do in themselves. They will be judges of what is good for them and righteous in itself, rather than admit of God to judge for them. When men draw back from truth to error, it is to such opinions which may serve more to foment and cherish their ambition, covetousness, or some beloved lust that disputes with God for precedency, and is designed to be served before him: John xii. 42, 43, 'They love the praise of men more

than the praise of God.' A preferring man before God was the reason they would not confess Christ, and God in him.

(9.) This shews us the excellency of the gospel and Christian religion. It sets man in his due place, and gives to God what the excellency of his nature requires. It lays man in the dust from whence he was taken, and sets God upon that throne where he ought to sit. Man by nature would annihilate God and deify himself; the gospel glorifies God and annihilates man. In our first revolt we would be like him in knowledge; in the means he hath provided for our recovery he designs to make us like him in grace. The gospel shews ourselves to be an object of humiliation, and God to be a glorious object for our imitation. The light of nature tells us there is a God; the gospel gives us a more magnificent report of him. The light of nature condemns gross atheism, and that of the gospel condemns and conquers spiritual atheism in the hearts of men.

Use 2. Of exhortation.

(1.) Let us labour to be sensible of this atheism in our nature, and be humbled for it. How should we lie in the dust, and go bowing under the humbling thoughts of it all our days! Shall we not be sensible of that whereby we spill the blood of our souls, and give a stab to the heart of our own salvation? Shall we be worse than any creature, not to bewail that which tends to our destruction? He that doth not lament it cannot challenge the character of a Christian, hath nothing of the divine life and love planted in his soul. Not a man but shall one day be sensible, when the eternal God shall call him out to examination, and charge his conscience to discover every crime, which will then own the authority whereby it acted; when the heart shall be torn open, and the secrets of it brought to public view, and the world and man himself shall see what a viperous brood of corrupt principles and ends nested in his heart. Let us, therefore, be truly sensible of it, till the consideration draws tears from our eyes and sorrow from our souls. Let us urge the thoughts of it upon our hearts, till the core of that pride be eaten out, and our stubbornness changed into humility; till our heads become waters, and our eyes fountains of tears, and be a spring of prayer to God, to change the heart and mortify the atheism in it, and consider what a sad thing it is to be a practical atheist; and who is not so by nature?

Let us be sensible of it in ourselves. Have any of our hearts been a soil wherein the fear and reverence of God hath naturally grown? Have we a desire to know him, or a will to embrace him? Do we delight in his will, and love the remembrance of his name? Are our respects to him as God equal to the speculative knowledge we have of his nature? Is the heart, wherein he hath stamped his image, reserved for his residence? Is not the world more affected than the Creator of the world, as though that could contribute to us a greater happiness than the author of it? Have not creatures as much of our love, fear, trust, nay, more than God, that framed both them and thus? Have we not too often relied upon our own strength, and made a calf of our own wisdom, and said of God as the Israelites of Moses, 'As for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him,' *Exod. xxxii. 1*; and given oftener the glory of our good success to our drag and our net, to our craft and our industry, than to the wisdom and blessing of God? Are we then free from this sort of atheism? * It is as impossible to have two gods at one time in one heart as to have two kings at one time in full power in one kingdom. Have there not been frequent neglects of God? Have we not been deaf whilst he hath knocked at our doors, slept when he hath sounded

* *Lawson, Body of Divinity, p. 153, 154.*

in our ears, as if there had been no such being as a God in the world; how many strugglings have been against our approaches to him? Hath not folly often been committed with vain imaginations starting up in the time of religious service, which we would scarce vouchsafe a look to at another time, and in another business, but would have thrust them away with indignation? Had they stepped in to interrupt our worldly affairs, they would have been troublesome intruders, but while we are with God they are acceptable guests. How unwilling have our hearts been to fortify themselves with strong and influencing considerations of God before we addressed to him? Is it not too often that our lifelessness in prayer proceeds from this atheism, a neglect of seeing what arguments and pleas may be drawn from the divine perfections, to second our suit in hand, and quicken our hearts in the service? Whence are those indispositions to any spiritual duty, but because we have not due thoughts of the majesty, holiness, goodness, and excellency of God? Is there any duty which leads to a more particular inquiry after him, or a more clear vision of him, but our hearts have been ready to rise up and call it cursed rather than blessed? Are not our minds bemisted with an ignorance of him, our wills drawn by aversion from him, our affections rising in distaste of him? More willing to know anything than his nature, and more industrious to do anything than his will? Do we not all fall under some one or other of these considerations? Is it not fit then that we should have a sense of them? It is to be bewailed by us that so little of God is in our hearts, when so many evidences of the love of God are in the creatures, that God should be so little our end who hath been so much our benefactor, that he should be so little in our thoughts who sparkles in everything which presents itself to our eyes.

(2.) Let us be sensible of it in others. We ought to have a just execration of the too open iniquity in the midst of us, and imitate holy David, whose tears plentifully gushed out, 'because men kept not God's law,' Ps. cxix. 136. And is it not a time to exercise this pious lamentation? Hath the wicked atheism of any age been greater, or can you find worse in hell than we may hear of, and behold on earth? How is the excellent majesty of God adored by the angels in heaven, despised and reproached by men on earth, as if his name were published to be matter of their sport! What a gasping thing is a natural sense of God among men in the world! Is not the law of God, accompanied with such dreadful threatenings and curses, made light of, as if men would place their honour in being above or beyond any sense of that glorious majesty? How many wallow in pleasures, as if they had been made men only to turn brutes, and their souls given them only for salt to keep their bodies from putrefying? It is as well a part of atheism not to be sensible of the abuses of God's name and laws by others, as to violate them ourselves. What is the language of a stupid senselessness of them, but that there is no God in the world, whose glory is worth a vindication, and deserves our regards?

That we may be sensible of the unworthiness of neglecting God as our rule and end, consider,

1. The unreasonableness of it as it concerns God.

(1.) First, It is a high contempt of God. It is an inverting the order of things, a making God the highest to become the lowest, and self the lowest to become the highest; to be guided by every base companion, some idle vanity, some carnal interest, is to acknowledge an excellency abounding in them which is wanting in God; an equity in their orders and none in God's precepts; a goodness in their promises and a falsity in God's, as if infinite excellency were a mere vanity, and to act for God were the debasement of

our reason ; to act for self, or some pitiful creature, or sordid lust, were the glory and advancement of it. To prefer any one sin before the honour of God is as if that sin had been our creator and benefactor, as if it were the original cause of our being and support. Do not men pay as great a homage to that as they do to God ? Do not their minds eagerly pursue it ? Are not the revolvings of it in their fancies as delightful to them as the remembrance of God to a holy soul ? Do any obey the commands of God with more readiness than they do the orders of their base affections ? Did Peter leap more readily into the sea to meet his master than many into the jaws of hell to meet their Delilahs ? How cheerfully did the Israelites part with their ornaments for the sake of an idol, who would not have spared a moiety for the honour of their deliverer ! Exod. xxxii. 3, ' All the people brake off the golden earrings.' If to make God our end is the principal duty in nature, then to make ourselves or anything else our end is the greatest vice in the rank of evils.

(2.) Secondly, It is a contempt of God as the most amiable object. God is infinitely excellent and desirable : Zech. ix. 17, ' How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty ! ' There is nothing in him but what may ravish our affections ; none that knows him but finds attractives to keep them with him ; he hath nothing in him which can be a proper object of contempt, no defects or shadow of evil ; there is infinite excellency to charm us, and infinite goodness to allure us ; the author of our beings, the benefactor of our lives ; why then should man, which is his image, be so base as to slight the beautiful original which stamped it on him ! He is the most lovely object, therefore to be studied, therefore to be honoured, therefore to be followed. In regard of his perfection, he hath the highest right to our thoughts. All other beings were eminently contained in his essence, and were produced by his infinite power. The creature hath nothing but what it hath from God. And is it not unworthy to prefer the copy before the original, to fall in love with a picture instead of the beauty it represents ? The creature, which we advance to be our rule and end, can no more report to us the true amiableness of God, than a few colours mixed and suited together upon a piece of cloth can the moral and intellectual loveliness of the soul of man. To condemn God one moment is more base than if all creatures were condemned by us for ever ; because the excellency of creatures is to God like that of a drop to the sea, or a spark to the glory of unconceivable millions of suns. As much as the excellency of God is above our conceptions, so much doth the debasing of him admit of unexpressible aggravations.

2. Consider the ingratitude in it. That we should resist that God with our hearts, who made us the work of his hands, and count him as nothing from whom we derive all the good that we are or have, there is no contempt of man but steps in here to aggravate our slighting of God, because there is no relation one man can stand in to another wherein God doth not more highly appear to man. If we abhor the unworthy carriage of a child to a tender father, a servant to an indulgent master, a man to his obliging friend, why do men daily act that towards God which they cannot speak of without abhorrency if acted by another against man ? Is God a being less to be regarded than man, and more worthy of contempt than a creature ? It would be strange if a benefactor should live in the same town, in the same house with us, and we never exchange a word with him ; yet this is our case, who have the works of God in our eyes, the goodness of God in our being, the mercy of God in our daily food, yet think so little of him, converse so little with him, serve everything before him, and prefer every-

thing above him.* Whence have we our mercies but from his hand? Who, besides him, maintains our breath this moment? Would he call for our spirits this moment, they must depart from us to attend his command. There is not a moment wherein our unworthy carriage is not aggravated, because there is not a moment wherein he is not a guardian, and gives us not tastes of a fresh bounty. And it is no light aggravation of our crime that we injure him, without whose bounty in giving us our being, we had not been capable of casting contempt upon him; that he that hath the greatest stamp of his image, man, should deserve the character of the worst of his rebels; that he who hath only reason by the gift of God to judge of the equity of the laws of God, should swell against them as grievous, and the government of the lawgiver as burdensome. Can it lessen the crime, to use the principle wherein we excel the beasts, to the disadvantage of God, who endowed us with that principle above the beasts.

(1.) It is a debasing of God beyond what the devil doth at present. He is more excusable in his present state of acting than man is in his present refusing God for his rule and end. He strives against a God that exerciseth upon him a vindictive justice; we debase a God that loads us with his daily mercies. The despairing devils are excluded from any mercy or divine patience, but we are not only under the long-suffering of his patience, but the large expressions of his bounty. He would not be governed by him when he was only his bountiful Creator. We refuse to be guided by him after he hath given us the blessing of creation from his own hand, and the more obliging blessings of redemption by the hand and blood of his Son.

It cannot be imagined that the devils and the damned should ever make God their end, since he hath assured them he will not be their happiness, and shut up all his perfections from their experimental notice, but those of his power to preserve them, and his justice to punish them. They have no grant from God of ever having a heart to comply with his will, or ever having the honour to be actively employed for his glory. They have some plea for their present contempt of God; not in regard of his nature, for he is infinitely amiable, excellent, and lovely, but in regard of his administration towards them. But what plea can man have for his practical atheism, who lives by his power, is sustained by his bounty, and solicited by his Spirit? What an ungrateful thing is it to put off the nature of man for that of devils, and dishonour God under mercy, as the devils do under his wrathful anger!

(2.) It is an ungrateful contempt of God, who cannot be injurious to us. He cannot do us wrong, because he cannot be unjust: Gen. xviii. 25, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' His nature doth as much abhor unrighteousness as love a communicative goodness. He never commanded anything but what was highly conducive to the happiness of man. Infinite goodness can no more injure man than it can dishonour itself. It lays out itself in additions of kindness, and whiles we debase him, he continues to benefit us. And is it not an unparalleled ingratitude to turn our backs upon an object so lovely, an object so loving, in the midst of varieties of allurements from him? God did create intellectual creatures, angels and men, that he might communicate more of himself, and his own goodness and holiness to man, than creatures of a lower rank were capable of. What do we do by rejecting him as a rule and end, but cross, as much as in us lies, God's end in our creation, and shut our souls against the communications of those perfections he was so willing to bestow? We use him as if he intended us the greatest wrong, when it is impossible for him to do any to any of his creatures.

3. Consider the misery which will attend such a temper if it continue

predominant. Those that thrust God away as their happiness and end, can expect no other but to be thrust away by him as to any relief and compassion. A distance from God here can look for nothing but a remoteness from God hereafter. When the devil, a creature of vast endowments, would advance himself above God, and instruct man to commit the same sin, he is 'cursed above all creatures,' Gen. iii. 14. When we will not acknowledge him a God of all glory, we shall be separated from him as a God of all comfort: 'All they that are afar off shall perish,' Ps. lxxiii. 27. This is the spring of all woe. What the prodigal suffered was because he would leave his father and live of himself. Whosoever is ambitious to be his own heaven, will at last find his soul to become his own hell. As it loved all things for itself, so it shall be grieved with all things for itself. As it would be its own god against the right of God, it shall then be its own tormentor by the justice of God.

2. Duty. Watch against this atheism, and be daily employed in the mortification of it. In every action we should make the inquiry, What is the rule I observe? Is it God's will or my own? Whether do my intentions tend to set up God or self? As much as we destroy this, we abate the power of sin. These two things are the head of the serpent in us, which we must be bruising by the power of the cross. Sin is nothing else but a turning from God and centring in self, and most in the inferior part of self. If we bend our force against those two, self-will and self-ends, we shall intercept atheism at the spring-head, take away that which doth constitute and animate all sin. The sparks must vanish, if the fire be quenched which affords them fuel. They are but two short things to ask in every undertaking: Is God my rule in regard of his will? Is God my end in regard of his glory? All sin lies in the neglect of these, all grace lies in the practice of them.

Without some degree of the mortification of these, we cannot make profitable and comfortable approaches to God. When we come with idols in our hearts, we shall be answered according to the multitude and the baseness of them too, Ezek. xiv. 4. What expectation of a good look from him can we have, when we come before him with undeifying thoughts of him, a petition in our mouths, and a sword in our hearts to stab his honour!

To this purpose,

(1.) Be often in the views of the excellencies of God. When we have no intercourse with God by delightful meditations, we begin to be estranged from him, and prepare ourselves to live without God in the world. Strangeness is the mother and nurse of disaffection. We slight men sometimes because we know them not. The very beasts delight in the company of men, when being trained and familiar, they become acquainted with their disposition. A daily converse with God would discover so much of loveliness in his nature, so much of sweetness in his ways, that our injurious thoughts of God would wear off, and we should count it our honour to condemn ourselves and magnify him. By this means, a slavish fear, which is both a dishonour to God and a torment to the soul, 1 John iv. 18, and the root of atheism, will be cast out, and an ingenious* fear of him wrought in the heart. Exercised thoughts on him would issue out in affections to him, which would engage our hearts to make him both our rule and our end. This course would stifle any temptations to gross atheism wherewith good souls are sometimes haunted, by confirming us more in the belief of a God, and discourage any attempts to a deliberate practical atheism. We are not like to espouse any principle which is confuted by the delightful converse we

* That is 'ingenuous.'—Ed.

daily have with him. The more we thus enter into the presence chamber of God, the more we cling about him with our affections ; the more vigorous and lively will the true notion of God grow up in us, and be able to prevent anything which may dishonour him and debase our souls.

Let us therefore consider him as the only happiness, set up the true God in our understandings, possess our hearts with a deep sense of his desirable excellency above all other things. This is the main thing we are to do in order to our great business. All the directions in the world, with the neglect of this, will be insignificant ciphers. The neglect of this is common, and is the basis of all the mischiefs which happen to the souls of men.

(2.) To this purpose, prize and study the Scripture. We can have no delight in meditation on him unless we know him, and we cannot know him but by the means of his own revelation. When the revelation is despised, the revealer will be of little esteem. Men do not throw off God from being their rule, till they throw off Scripture from being their guide ; and God must needs be cast off from being an end, when the Scripture is rejected from being a rule. Those that do not care to know his will, that love to be ignorant of his nature, can never be affected to his honour. Let, therefore, the subtilties of reason veil to the doctrine of faith, and the humour of the will to the command of the word.

(3.) Take heed of sensual pleasures, and be very watchful and cautious in the use of those comforts God allows us. Job was afraid, when his sons feasted, that they should 'curse God in their hearts,' Job i. 4, 5. It was not without cause that the apostle Peter joined sobriety with watchfulness and prayer : 1 Pet. iv. 7, 'The end of all things is at hand ; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.' A moderate use of worldly comforts. Prayer is the great acknowledgment of God, and too much sensuality is a hindrance of this, and a step to atheism. Belshazzar's lifting himself up against the Lord, and not glorifying of God, is charged upon his sensuality, Dan. v. 23. Nothing is more apt to quench the notions of God, and root out the conscience of him, than an addictedness to sensual pleasures. Therefore take heed of that snare.

(4.) Take heed of sins against knowledge. The more sins against knowledge are committed, the more careless we are, and the more careless we shall be of God and his honour. We shall more fear his judicial power, and the more we fear that, the more we shall disaffect that God in whose hand vengeance is, and to whom it doth belong. Atheism in conversation proceeds to atheism in affection, and that will endeavour to sink into atheism in opinion and judgment.

The sum of the whole.

And now consider, in the whole, what has been spoken.

1. Man would set himself up as his own rule. He disowns the rule of God, is unwilling to have any acquaintance with the rule God sets him, negligent in using the means for the knowledge of his will, and endeavours to shake it off when any notices of it breaks in upon him. When he cannot expel it, he hath no pleasure in the consideration of it, and the heart swells against it. When the notions of the will of God are entertained, it is on some other consideration, or with wavering and unsettled affections. Many times men design to improve some lust by his truth. This unwillingness respects truth, as it is most spiritual and holy, as it most relates and leads to God, as it is most contrary to self. He is guilty of contempt of the will of God, which is seen in every presumptuous breach of his law ; in the natural aversions to the declaration of his will and mind, which way soever he turns ; in slighting that part of his will which is most for his honour ;

in the awkwardness of the heart when it is to pay God a service ; a constraint in the first engagement ; slightness in the service, in regard of the matter ; in regard of the frame, without a natural vigour ; many distractions, much weariness ; in deserting the rule of God, when our expectations are not answered upon our service ; in breaking promises with God.

Man naturally owns any other rule, rather than that of God's prescribing. The rule of Satan, the will of man ; in complying more with the dictates of men than the will of God ; in observing that which is materially so, not because it is his will, but the injunctions of men ; in obeying the will of man, when it is contrary to the will of God. This man doth, in order to the setting up himself. This is natural to man, as he is corrupted. Men are dissatisfied with their own consciences, when they contradict the desires of self. Most actions in the world are done, more because they are agreeable to self, than as they are honourable to God ; as they are agreeable to natural and moral self, or sinful self. It is evident in neglects of taking God's directions upon emergent occasions ; in counting the actions of others to be good or bad, as they suit with, or spurn against, our fancies and humours. Man would make himself the rule of God, and give laws to his Creator, in striving against his law, disapproving of his methods of government in the world, in impatience in our particular concerns, envying the gifts and prosperity of others, corrupt matter or ends of prayer or praise, bold interpretations of the judgments of God in the world, mixing rules in the worship of God with those which have been ordained by him, suiting interpretations of Scripture with our own minds and humours, falling off from God after some fair compliances, when his will grates upon us and crosseth ours.

2. Man would be his own end. This is natural and universal. This is seen in frequent self-applauses and inward overweening reflections ; in ascribing the glory of what we do or have to ourselves ; in desire of self-pleasing doctrines ; in being highly concerned in injuries done to ourselves, and little or not at all concerned for injuries done to God ; in trusting in ourselves ; in working for carnal self, against the light of our own consciences. This is a usurping God's prerogative, vilifying God, destroying God. Man would make anything his end or happiness rather than God. This appears in the fewer thoughts we have of him than of anything else : in the greedy pursuit of the world ; in the strong addictedness to sensual pleasures ; in paying a service, upon any success in the world, to instruments more than to God. This is a debasing God, in setting up a creature ; but more in setting up a base lust : it is a denying of God. Man would make himself the end of all creatures : in pride, using the creatures contrary to the end God hath appointed ; this is to dishonour God, and it is diabolical. Man would make himself the end of God : in loving God, because of some self-pleasing benefits distributed by him ; in abstinence from some sins, because they are against the interest of some other beloved corruption ; in performing duties merely for a selfish interest, which is evident in unwieldiness in religious duties where self is not concerned ; in calling upon God only in a time of necessity ; in begging his assistance to our own projects, after we have by our own craft laid the plot ; in impatience upon a refusal of our desires ; in selfish aims we have in our duties. This is a vilifying God, a dethroning him. In unworthy imaginations of God, universal in man by nature. Hence springs idolatry, superstition, presumption, the common disease of the world. This is a vilifying God, worse than idolatry, worse than absolute atheism. Natural desires to be distant from him ; no desires for the remembrance of him ; no desires of converse with him ; no desires of a thorough return to him ; no desire of any close imitation of him.