

## SERMON XVIII.

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HOW MAY WE GRACIOUSLY IMPROVE THOSE DOCTRINES AND PROVIDENCES WHICH TRANSCEND OUR UNDERSTANDINGS?

*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*—Romans xi. 33.

IN this chapter the apostle, discoursing about the great point of election and reprobation, comes to an instance in God's wonderful providence toward Jew and Gentile. The Jews, who were formerly God's people, are now under unbelief; and the Gentile, a stranger to his covenant, hath "now obtained mercy." This doctrine and providence of God, both together, do fill the apostle with admiration; and this admiration breaks out into these words: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

In this text, therefore, we have exemplified our subject in hand, thus: *There are doctrines and providences which transcend our understandings.* Wherefore I shall first offer some demonstrations, by proposing to you some of those DOCTRINES, and some of those PROVIDENCES; and then shall come to *show how they may be graciously improved.* I will begin with the doctrines.

I. That there are some DOCTRINES contained in the sacred scripture which transcend the largest created capacity, will with much conviction appear to any that will with any intension of mind fix their thoughts on those doctrines which I single out and insist on. It is true, there are some doctrines so plainly revealed in scripture that he that runs may read them, especially such as do principally concern salvation; but even these contain in them somewhat extraordinary and surprising. There are some necessary points so plainly revealed in holy writ, that to be acquainted with and believe the scriptures, and yet not believe the truth of these, is impossible; but then, there are also other points which, as they are not very clearly revealed, so they are so deep and profound, that the framing distinct conceptions of them is beyond our reach. Though we may be satisfied that it is a truth, yet we cannot comprehend *how* it should be; there is somewhat that lies deep, out of our view, which, after the utmost study, cannot be found out. Not that gospel-truths contradict our soundest reasonings, but do transcend them.

There is a great difference between these two, namely, a contradicting and a transcending our reason. What *contradicts* our reason

is not, it cannot be, received by us; but what *transcends* may, yea, in many cases must, be entertained and embraced. That what contradicts our reason is not to be received, nor can it be a part of true religion, is manifest; in that, whatever is so has nothing of reason in it; it is unreasonable, and rather suited unto the nature of brutes, than unto that of men, which is rational. True religion is designed for the regulation of the rational powers in their actings and exercises; and therefore must be somewhat agreeable unto reason, and not what is contrary unto it. What is contrary unto reason must be rejected, and by no means embraced as a part thereof. In like manner, all contradictions must be exploded as unreasonable. God lays no man under the obligation of believing what cannot possibly be true; and our soundest reason assures us, that to believe contradictions is to believe what cannot be true. But though what is contrary to reason must not be received as an article of our creed, yet what transcends it may. What is above our capacities may be true and from God; though what is contrary unto our reason is not true, nor can be from God.

On this distinction I do the rather insist, as well to obviate what is suggested by Papists and others,—who receive for articles of their faith what is contrary unto right reason,—as to anticipate the Socinians' objections, who will believe nothing that transcends our scanty and narrow capacities.

(1.) That this may be the more plain and convincing, before I proceed to show what are some of those mysterious doctrines which transcend our intellects, I will acquaint the reader with *some notions received by many, which, being contrary unto our clearest and surest reasonings, are not to be improved, but rejected.*

I will mention but some: 1. *Transubstantiation*; 2. *Merit quoad justitiam commutativam*; [*“as to commutative justice;”*] and, 3. *A physical transition of sins actually inherent in us, from us unto Christ; and of Christ's righteousness unto us*: all which are to be rejected as notions contrary to our reason.

1. *Transubstantiation.*—A doctrine asserted by the Papists to be contained in holy writ, but really not so. By “transubstantiation” is meant, the turning of the elements in the Lord's supper into the very substance of Christ's body. Though the accidents which are proper unto bread and wine, distinguishing them from every other being, be there; yet the substance of bread and wine, the only subject of the proper accidents, is not there. That is,

(1.) The proper accidents of bread and wine are common unto these subjects and a human body; which is a contradiction.

(2.) These accidents,—namely, the colour and taste of bread, &c.,—whose whole existence is in-existence in a subject, do exist even when they do not in-exist; namely, when they pass from the bread unto Christ's body.

Moreover, the body of Christ is asserted to be bodily under these accidents, even when there is not any one accident proper unto a human body.

These and many other contradictions must be received as true, if you will, with the Papists, put the doctrine of transubstantiation into your creed. But as this conceit of theirs has not the least countenance of scripture, so it is contrary unto our reason, as well as common sense, and to be rejected as unsound and false, as well as absurd and unreasonable.

2. *Merit quoad justitiam commutativam* [*as to commutative justice*].—There are among the Papists a considerable number who assert that there may be a meriting somewhat of God according to the rules of commutative justice. That there may be a meriting somewhat of God according to the rule of justice, we grant; for Jesus Christ merited much of God: but this merit was not according to the rule of *commutative* justice, but of *distributive* justice.

Merit as to *commutative* justice does necessarily include in it the passing of somewhat over unto God, unto which God had no right antecedent unto this transaction. But God is an absolute Lord and Sovereign, who has a right unto all things: Jesus Christ himself, as man, is God's propriety [property]; and all that Jesus Christ could give, must be considered as Christ's, either as he is God, or as he is man. Whatever belongs to him as God, is God's; and as he is man, whatever he has, it is God's: for which reason, Jesus Christ himself is not excepted, when it is said by the apostle, "Who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Rom. xi. 35.) "Who?" As if it had been said, "There is none, no, not one, not Jesus Christ himself, [who] could give first unto God, could give that unto God unto which God had not, antecedently to that gift, a right; that is, so to give unto God, as to pass-over a new right unto God, for which God should be under the obligation of recompensing it. Commutative righteousness is inconsistent with the absolute sovereignty and dominion of God: whence it must be acknowledged, that either God is not the absolute Sovereign and Lord of the universe,—which if not, he is not God,—or there is no such thing as commutative righteousness in God, and that Christ himself, much less man, could not merit of God any thing according to the rule of commutative righteousness.

That Christ merited according to *distributive* justice, is asserted by all sound Protestants, and by Vasquez and other Papists; yea, and that Adam in innocency, according to the tenor of that law there given him, might, by rendering the required perfect obedience, have merited the promised reward,—that is, the merit would have been of such efficacy, that God could not have remained just, and not have given out the reward of life,—is also granted.

But a merit as to *commutative* justice contains in it an implication, when spoken of God; for in plain English it is to say, that the absolute Sovereign is not absolute Sovereign. However, this notion is embraced by some Papists, who do not only say, that commutative justice is in God, but that, according to the rule of commutative justice, man may merit of God: the which is the more absurd, as it supposes that man can give that unto God which is of a value

proportionable to eternal life ; although eternal life, as it is to endure infinitely, includes in it somewhat of an infinite excellency. Such is the nature of commutative justice as to stick to an arithmetical proportion in adjusting the value of things commuted, which cannot be by man in this case, unless there were somewhat of infinity in what he gives unto God. However, notwithstanding the ridiculousness, as well as falseness, of the notion, there are many among the Papists (if we may believe Arriaga) who assert it. It is true, Vasquez explodes it, with an essay to evince that the Papists generally reject it ; but Arriaga, a later Jesuit, freely rebukes Vasquez, affirming that commutative righteousness is in God, and may be found to be between God and man, and that this is generally received in the church of Rome. "For," says he, "this is the opinion of Suarez, Valentia, Granadus, (who introduces Medina and Alvarez, to agree with him in this point,) Hurtado de Mendoza, Ragusa, Tannerus, and Albertinus, and Molina also ; who, though he expresses himself with caution in one place, yet elsewhere doth freely enough own it. Besides, Capreolus and the Thomists generally," says Arriaga, "do agree with him in this ;" and that therefore Vasquez is greatly to be blamed for affirming that so many were of the contrary opinion ; whereas this about merit *quoad justitiam commutativam*, ["as to commutative justice,"] has many more authorities than Vasquez could produce for his sense of it. In fine, Arriaga corrects Vasquez's mistake, in saying that Hosius and Sotus were against commutative righteousness, and then proceeds to an attempt of demonstrating the truth of this doctrine.

By this it is apparent that, if we may believe Arriaga, the Papists generally assert merit according to commutative justice ; in which sense it is mostly oppugned by the Protestant writers, as a ridiculous doctrine : the which, from what has been already suggested, has been manifested. But seeing this doctrine contradicts our reason, our endeavours must not be how to improve it ; we must immediately reject it as false and unreasonable.

3. There are some who call themselves Protestants, and who seem to be zealous assertors of imputed righteousness, who, being ignorant of the gospel-notion, do assert *that those very sins which actually inhered in the elect, did pass from them unto Christ ; and that the righteousness of Christ which actually inhered in him, passes from him unto the elect.* But this is a notion as contrary unto our reasons as that of transubstantiation ; it being as impossible that our sins or Christ's righteousness, which are accidents inhering in subjects, should pass from us to Christ or from Christ to us, as [that] the accidents of bread and wine should pass from the substance of bread and wine, and inhere in Christ's body. These notions, then, I reject as false, and contrary unto reason.

(II.) But there are *other doctrines revealed in scripture, which transcend our largest capacities.*—There are, I must acknowledge, many momentous and important points, which, though clearly enough revealed, and in themselves not very hard to be understood, yet,

because either obscurely or after a perplexed manner handled, by some are listed among the *δυσνοητα*, ["things hard to be understood,"] of which the apostle Peter makes some mention, (2 Peter iii. 16,) which by the "unlearned" are abused to their own hurt, even when by the more judicious they are clearly understood and readily embraced. However, it is as certain that there are other doctrines which, bearing the characters of infinite wisdom on them, are so grand and august, that they transcend the most enlarged understandings. Of the truth of these doctrines we may be fully assured, but yet cannot fully comprehend the whole of them: we may know enough to raise our admiration, but cannot frame any adequate conceptions of them.

These doctrines are many, and may be distinctly considered, either as they have reference more immediately unto the nature and being of God, his acts, both immanent and transient, and, consequently, the modes of operation; or as they have a special aspect on those profound and mysterious transactions about the carrying on [of] fallen man's salvation in a way adjusted to the glory of all the Divine perfections.

1. *The many doctrines which more immediately respect the nature of God, his acts and modes of operation.*

(1.) More generally: they are such as represent somewhat of Him, who in all perfections is infinite, and infinitely above us. God is a Spirit, infinite,—infinite in his essence,—or immense,—infinite in his existence, or eternal. There is, according to the conceptions we must form of God,—at least, *quoad nos*, ["in reference to us,"] a difference between immensity and eternity. "Immensity" denotes the essence of God to be more large and comprehensive than can be measured; but the import of "eternity" is to be considered with regard to the duration of the Divine Essence. Whence, although we must assert the essence and existence of God to be so much the same that necessary existence is included in the very essence of God, yet we may look on the Divine Existence to be a *pressior conceptus* ["a more concise conception"] to that of the Divine Essence: for "essence" includes somewhat more than mere "existence," namely, other perfections of the Divine Nature; which when considered as it fills heaven and earth, and is infinitely beyond all, without all bounds or limits, it is said to be "immense;" but considered as enduring from everlasting to everlasting, it is "eternal." The like of the other attributes.

Thus our finite capacities may form some partial and inadequate conceptions of these things; but comprehend them we cannot. If we look into any particular attribute of God, we are swallowed up as in a bottomless ocean. For there is not any one Divine Perfection that includes not in it infinity, the which is so far above us, that we cannot reach unto it. We cannot know Him "unto perfection," nor "by searching find him out." He is "higher than the heavens, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea:" (Job xi. 7—9:) we cannot comprehend him. His nature, his attri-

butes, all his glorious perfections, being infinite, are infinitely above us; and seeing the revelations made of God do, after a sort, represent somewhat of his glorious nature, they are not fully comprehended by us: they point unto somewhat that is beyond us. But, to be more particular:—

(2.) God, who is a Spirit infinite, is absolutely and simply *One*,—he is a pure act,—but yet *three*; *one* absolutely and simply,—one God; and yet *three*,—three Persons. None can be more concerned in asserting the Oneness or Unity of the Godhead than the Christian. How vehement soever the Mahometan, Jew, or Socinian may be in asserting the simplicity and Oneness of the Divine Nature, they cannot be more so than we are. But yet a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead we must also affirm, or our religion is lost.

Whoever will but seriously acquaint himself with the essentials of the Christian religion, will find that the believing a Trinity is as necessary to the being of our religion, as the believing the existence of God is to any religion. The Spirit of God has not only here and there expressly asserted the doctrine of the Trinity; but every momentous doctrine of our religion which is appropriate unto it, as it is Christian, supposes it.

There are three fundamentals of our faith, all which, conjunctly considered, suppose a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead; even God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. There is the fall of man, his redemption, and sanctification. God at first made man upright, and gave him a holy, just, and good law, which was sanctioned with the promise of a glorious reward, and with the severe threat of Divine wrath and indignation: “Do this, and live;” but “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. ii. 17.) Man transgresses this law, and is obnoxious unto the threatening; he must die: for God, who is infinite in all perfections, is a God of truth, and must accomplish his word. He is essentially just and righteous, and must proportion the punishment to the nature of the crime. An infinite God is offended, his law is violated; and this by man, by Adam, the head of human nature: and therefore it is impossible that any escape infinite (which is, on finite worms, eternal) wrath, unless the justice of God be satisfied by proportionable sufferings in that nature that sinned. But if there had been but one Person, as there is but one God, there could not be an infinite Person to undertake for us. That one Person who was offended would be alone able to satisfy his own justice: but he is angry, he demands satisfaction from another; and should he enter into judgment with us, we should not be able to stand. (Psalm cxxx. 3; cxl. 2.) He demands satisfaction, and is ready to consume us, unless an infinite Person interposes on our behalf. Should he himself begin to capitulate with us singly, he would be so far from offering himself to satisfy himself for us, that he would immediately let out all his wrath.

Thus we see that the doctrines about man’s fall and redemption do necessarily infer that there is *God the Father*, who gave us a righ-

teous law, and who is highly provoked by the violation of it, and, as a righteous Judge, proceeds to condemn us, unless satisfaction be made unto his justice; and that there [is] *God the Son*, a person distinct from the Father, who is also God, sent by the Father, and who assumed human nature, in which he suffered, and satisfied the justice of the Father, whereby fallen man is in a way of recovery. Thus man's fall and his recovery suppose two Persons.

But whoever will more closely attend unto this point, will find that God, being as holy as he is just and righteous, is as much concerned for the vindication of the honour of his holiness as that of his justice; whence our sanctification becomes as necessary an antecedent unto our salvation as our justification. Though justification and sanctification are in their own natures formally and really distinct, yet are [they] ever in one and the same subject: you may and must distinguish them from each other, but cannot separate them. And the reason is, because God is as holy as he is righteous, and as much concerned for the glory of his holiness as for the glory of his justice; and therefore the holy as well as the righteous will of God must be satisfied. But such are the corruptions of our nature, so strong and powerful, and we so weak and feeble, that unless some one almighty be our help, we shall remain under the power of sin, unsanctified, and no way advantaged by the redemption of Christ's death.

It is true, Christ has died; but not to save us in, but from, our sins. It was never the design of Christ that men should receive any special blessings as the fruit of his death, while they continue under the power of sin, enemies unto him. He has made a purchase of heaven's glories, but will give it to none but such as submit themselves unto him. He will that we humble ourselves before him, and be holy; or continue in the state of condemnation in which we are all by nature. But holy we cannot be without the help of an omnipotent Spirit, which only is able to enlighten our minds, and turn our hearts from the power of Satan unto God. All which supposes the third Person of the Trinity,—*the Holy Ghost*.

By this it is very manifest, that such is the frame of the Christian religion, such the great fundamentals thereof, that, without the supposing the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead, the Christian religion is gone, it is lost. And how to comprehend this mystery is impossible. There is no contradiction in this doctrine, nothing in it contrary to our reason: for it is not said, that three Gods are one; but three Persons are one, one God. But how to fathom the mystery, we are at a loss; it is certainly beyond us.

So much concerning the *nature and Persons of the Godhead*.

(3.) Those doctrines that have regard unto the *acts of God*, are also very profound and mysterious.

(i.) There are the *immanent acts* of God, which do not terminate on any objects *ad extra*, "off from" God; such as divine knowledge, and the decree, whether of election or reprobation.

(ii.) *Transient acts*; such as terminate on an object off from God; namely, the works of creation and providence.

(i.) In my discoursing about the *immanent acts* of God, I might be very distinct in considering what is very much insisted on by the Schoolmen with reference to the knowledge of God, and acquaint the reader with the many distinctions that are used by that sort of men ; but if I do so, I shall exceed the bounds allotted me. I will, therefore, pass-by the doctrine of prescience, (which, whatever may be said of it by some, has such difficulties in it as admit not of our solution,) and make some search into these profound doctrines about the decrees of election and reprobation.

That God has decreed the salvation of some particular persons, is evident enough to any that will deliberately consult the word of God ; and that it is the unchangeable determination of God that such as die in their sins shall be eternally damned, is as manifest. The eternal decree of election is so clearly, so fully and distinctly, revealed in scripture, that few or none presume wholly to deny it. And such is the known nature of election, that it is not easy to believe the doctrine of election, but withal we must take-in the other of reprobation : for election is but of some ; and if but some are taken, the other are left ; they are not chosen, they are refused, they are reprobated. But how this doctrine of God's leaving or reprobating any from all eternity is reconcilable to these other that concern the glory of Divine Goodness and Righteousness, is above us.

The sublapsarians have done very much toward the clearing up of this, by supposing all in their lapsed estate under the guilt and pollution of sin, and God from all eternity concerned for his own glory to elect some, who, by being interested in the blood of Christ, should through the sanctification of the Spirit obtain salvation with eternal glory ; but left others to themselves, who, continuing in sin, are determined to die. Hereby the glorious grace of God, in the eternal purpose of calling, justifying, sanctifying some, and thereby preparing them for heaven, is excellently displayed ; and the purposing from eternity to leave others to themselves in their sins, for which, after much long-suffering, they shall be eternally damned, is no way inconsistent with that goodness that is so infinitely extended to the "vessels of mercy," (Rom. ix. 23.) but does most fully illustrate how just and righteous God is in condemning them for their sins and transgressions. Besides, it is obvious enough that the decrees are but internal purposes "which have no influence on the thing decreed :"  
*Decreta nil ponunt in esse.* Though there is a certainty of the event, yet neither the sin nor destruction of the reprobate is an effect of the decree.

What is here said toward the clearing up [of] the difficulties that attend this doctrine, is very well urged by the Synod of Dort ; and it is no more than what has great countenance from the holy scriptures, which suppose all in a lapsed and fallen estate, and therefore represent the elect as "chosen in Christ, and predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ :"  
(Eph. i. 4, 5 :) "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit," &c. (1 Peter i. 2.) All which expressions seem to suppose



the elect in a fallen estate, standing in need both of a Redeemer and Sanctifier; even as the reprobates are said to have been "before of old ordained to condemnation;" (Jude 4;) which "condemnation" does presuppose a judicial procedure, and the sentence passed against them for their sin; which sufficiently suggests that they were considered to have been in a sinful, a fallen state. Nevertheless it must be acknowledged, that this does not remove the difficulty; it only supposes it to be insuperable, and therefore to be passed over in silence.

The great difficulty is,—how the absolute decree of reprobation is consistent either with the goodness or righteousness of God, or those other methods which are taken for the salvation of all men. What of goodness is there in destinating men to eternal misery? or what of justice, in purposing to punish them for ever without any regard to their sin, even before any evil done? Or how can the unalterable secret decree for their damnation accord with the sincerity of God in the many offers which are made of future glory? It is true [that], supposing the consideration of their fallen state as antecedent to the decree, it is goodness enough that any are chosen out of the sinful mass, and it would have been a righteous thing for God to have proceeded against all to a sentence of condemnation: and seeing Christ has died, and thereby satisfied justice, and the Spirit strives, and that common grace, which is sufficient to enable men to do more toward their salvation than they do, is offered them, and that it is their sin which is the only proper cause of their denying due subjection unto Christ, these things seem to be cleared up. Only the greatest difficulty remains; to wit,—how it is supposable that such who came pure out of the hand of God can be considered as fallen, without some respect unto the antecedent decree of God. What! is their fall, on the supposition of which depend all the discoveries of the glorious perfections of God made unto us in the scriptures, a mere casual hit? One would as soon think, that this curious and beautiful fabric, the world, was owing only unto the casual concurrence of Epicurean atoms for its being so, as that the glory and beauty, the wisdom and harmony, that shine forth most illustriously in the Christian religion, should be only the product of casualty or chance. But if the fall or sin of man must be considered to be decreed by that God, the purity and holiness of whose nature is infinite, we are as much at a plunge. So that, on the whole, we see in the decree of reprobation somewhat mysterious and profound: there is in this doctrine somewhat that may raise our greatest admiration, but can never be by vain mortals comprehended. For what of goodness [is there] in destinating those who were in a state of holiness and innocency unto sin and guilt? or what of righteousness, in the giving the innocent a law, and making them, contrary to their innate holy propensions, transgressors of that law? Or how does the sincerity of God appear in the offers of eternal life to Adam on his obedience, even when his disobedience was determined and inevitable? This shows that there is somewhat above us in this doctrine, and that, although there is nothing in this

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(ii.) The doctrine about the *transient acts* of God, whereby the execution of the decree is compassed, falls next under consideration. The decree, which is but an immanent act in God, does not put the thing decreed into being; that is done long after by some transient acts. The decree is from eternity, the execution only in time. The decree is but an internal purpose about what God will do in time; which decree in the time appointed being executed, the thing decreed is then put into being; the which cannot be done without the physical influence of God.

This is true of every decree, whether that of the world's creation, its being destroyed by the flood, or by the last conflagration. The decree of all this was eternal, but the execution in time. The world is first created; then, after some hundred years, [comes] the deluge; and although some thousand years have past, yet [the world is] not burnt. The same of the decree that some shall be glorified; which does necessarily presuppose that they must be first in being, before the decree of their glorification can be accomplished. It is naturally impossible, that what is not actually in being, should be actually the subject of glory or any thing else. Moreover, if we will believe what the Spirit says, (Rom. viii. 30,) they must be first effectually "called," and then "justified," and so, through the sanctification of the Spirit, be prepared for the glory. There is an order to be found in the execution of the decree, which is but according to the eternal counsels of the Divine Will.

An illustration of this we have in man, who may purpose to do many things in time: his internal purpose to do the thing may be long before the time appointed. And there is an order to be observed in his purposes; he purposes that one thing shall be first done, and after that another, as is best discovered by what he does. The which being so, we cannot argue that, such a man purposing to give his child an estate when he arrives unto the age of one-and-twenty, therefore it was actually given some years before. The like as to the point of election. God determined the justification, sanctification, and glory of some: God's purpose was from eternity; but he did then but purpose that this should be in time, and that sanctification should as necessarily precede the glory, as justification be *ordine naturæ* ["in the order of nature"] before his sanctification. And therefore it is absurd to argue: "God decreed their justification from eternity: therefore they were justified from eternity." God decreed that they should be first called, and then justified: and therefore, as sanctification must be before glory, and justification before sanctification, even so effectual vocation must be before their being justified; so that, although Paul be an elect vessel, yet he is not actually justified before he is effectually called.

These things are plain truths; but yet how to comprehend the ways of God in bringing these things to pass, is beyond our capacity: and that this is so, I will evince.

Among the learned there are great contests about the modes of Divine operation. All grant that the decrees would have remained unexecuted, had not God by some transient acts put the decree in being; and that this must be considered to be done by some physical efficiency of God, is acknowledged by all. It is true, the showing *how* this physical efficiency doth contribute toward the execution of the decree, is difficult; especially as to the causing such acts as are clothed with vicious modifications, where what is physical in that action is acknowledged to be from the efficiency of God. But whether the divine efficiency be mediate or immediate, is controverted between the Durandists on the one part, and all the rest of the Schoolmen generally on the other: but if immediate, whether *antecedenter*, *concomitanter*, or *consequenter*, is warmly debated by the rigid Dominicans, Scotists, and Molinists; each of these three factions differing from each other, and casting in one another's way insoluble difficulties.

It is true, the moderate Dominicans, such as Medina, Dominicus a Soto, and some others, do in my opinion give the best satisfaction in the stating these controversies. For they assert, that we must distinguish between what is natural and what is moral in a sinful action; and that the subject-matter of the vitiosity of a sinful action is somewhat natural; that all the undue modifications of it are moral, and included in the formality. Whence they proceed to conclude, that what is merely natural in a sinful action, is from God; (a notion no one will deny;) but what is moral and vicious in it, or that undueness that is the foundation of the sinful relation, (considering sin with reference to the law, whereof it is a transgression,) is from man.

This seems to be clear enough: only there still remains somewhat insoluble; for, whoever looks well into this controversy, will find that in the sinfulness of some actions there is somewhat positive. What else is the conversion or termination of a natural act on an undue object, or the undue determination of this act on a due object? It must be acknowledged, that sin does not only result when the act is about an undue object, but also when about a due object, if unduly conversant about it. For example: in the hatred of God, the object of this act is undue; but as for inordinate love to father or mother, the object of love in this case is not undue, but from the intension\* of the act doth the sinfulness result. Which intension is somewhat positive; but whether it must be considered as somewhat natural, or as somewhat merely moral, or mixed, partly natural and partly moral, is beyond me. But if not merely moral, it must be from God: and so God must be either the author of sin, or the foundation of this relation must not be considered to be included in the formality of sin; that is, the intension of the act, though inordinate and undue, is not sinful. By which it is manifest that, if we consider the controversy, there is somewhat above us in the fairest stating [of] it; much more so in the other accounts that are given. For as the rigid Dominicans do certainly make God the cause of sin, (whether culpable or not culpable,

\* Mr. Lobb has better observed the distinction between *intension* as signifying "intensity," and *intention* or "purpose," than any other author in this collection.—EDIT.

is not the question,) even so do the Scotists and Molinists: for they both include in the matter of sin somewhat more than what is merely natural, even somewhat that is morally vicious; and yet assert that this matter is the immediate effect of God's causality. Only the one says, that God does, as it were, take man by the hand, and lead him to sin; the other, that man determines the efficiency of God; and the Scotist says, that the first and second cause do walk hand-in-hand to the sin. But whether I lead another to the sin, and help him to commit it; or whether I am taken by the sinner, and determined to help him to produce what is sinful in the act; or whether I walk with him; still I am at least a con-causer of what is sinful in the act. So that neither the Scotist nor the Molinist give me any satisfaction in this matter. The result, therefore, of my thoughts is as follows:—I am sure that no natural being ever has been, is, or can be, without the efficiency of God, the First Cause; and yet I am as confident that no moral evil is in any sense the effect of the physical efficiency of God. The moral undueness that is considered as that which is the foundation of sin, cannot be from God. But yet how satisfactorily to reconcile these things, or how to comprehend the modes of divine operation, is above us; we cannot reach unto it; it transcends our understandings.

2. *There are also several doctrines, which have a special aspect on those transactions that are about the carrying on [of] fallen man's salvation to the illustrating [of] the glory of the Divine Perfections, which are very profound.*—The doctrines of the fall of man; the transition of original sin from Adam to his posterity; the methods taken for the recovery of the elect; the covenant of reconciliation between the Father and the Son from all eternity; the incarnation of the Son of God, and the many surprising doctrines with reference thereunto; even about his several offices as Mediator, and, in special, that of his being “a Priest after the order of Melchisedec;” his suretiship; how our sins were imputed to him, and his righteousness made ours; beside those doctrines about the nature of the mystical union that is between Christ and believers; and how this is the ground of imputation; and many other momentous points;—might be spoken unto, to evince that though there is nothing of contradiction in these doctrines, yet there is very much that transcends the most enlarged capacity. They are points that the angels themselves are prying into, but cannot fully comprehend. But these things I must wave, and go on to acquaint you with some of the many providences that do in like manner transcend our understandings.

II. Among the many amazing\* PROVIDENCES that are before us, I will single out a few.

\* This word occurs in other parts of this sermon, and was written by the author *amuzing* or *amusing*. Modern usage forbids its application in composition to the meaning in which it is here employed. But in an earlier age *amuse* and *amaze* were considered to be synonymous words, the derivation of each of them being very similar. For, whatever excites wonder and astonishment, throws the mind into a *maze* or a *muse*; both of these primitive words possessing the proper and figurative significations of a *labyrinth*, *perplexity*, or *confusion of thought*, the constituent materials from which are formed wonder and amazement.—EDIT.

1. *That the greatest part of the world should lie in wickedness, unacquainted with the methods of salvation, is an amazing providence.*—Look we into the remotest parts of the world, we find nothing but a strange ignorance of the true God, or of the true worship of God. O, how great a part of the world is overrun with Paganism, Mahometanism, and Judaism! Come we nearer home, and take a view of the Christian world. Behold, how small is it in comparison of those parts where the above-mentioned false religions prevail! and of the many thousands who are called Christians, how many [are] enveloped with the thick clouds of ignorance and error! and how few free from the influence of idolatry and superstition! A multitude of those who have been “baptized into the name of Christ,” have not the opportunity of looking into the sacred oracles, which reveal the true way to life everlasting; and of those who have the happy advantages of consulting the sacred scriptures, how few can understand them! The which is not without a providence of God: but can we compare these providences with those discoveries that are made of the infinite compassions of Almighty God toward the children of men, and comprehend a consistency between them?

In the scriptures it is said, that God would “have all men to be saved, and,” to that end, “to come unto the knowledge of the truth,” (1 Tim. ii. 4,) even when but a very small spot of the earth have any suitable means afforded them for the obtaining [of] such knowledge. In the scriptures the proclamation is general to all: “Ho, every one;” (Isai. lv. 1;) and the exhortation with sinners is, “Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die? As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of a sinner;” (“of a sinner” indefinitely; as if he had said, “of any sinner;”) “but rather that he would turn and live.” (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) Besides, did not Christ die for this end; namely, to show the unexpressible greatness of God’s love to the world? “God so loved,” *so, so* “loved the world:” (John iii. 16:) as if it had been said, “The love of God to the world is *so* transcendent that no words could sufficiently express it; nothing would fully represent it, but the delivery of the Son, the only-begotten Son of God, to the death—the cruel, the shameful, and the reproachful death—of the cross, for the salvation of the world on their believing; and this even when God left millions of angels to continue in everlasting chains of darkness.” Notwithstanding all which, it is manifest that they cannot “believe in him of whom they have not heard,” and cannot hear unless a preacher be sent unto them; and that no such thing has been done, no preacher has been sent; or if in one age, yet not in another. How can we reconcile these providences with the discoveries that are given us of the infinite compassion of God to mankind, when so few are made partakers of it? What of grace is there in leaving the greatest part of the world in a very little better condition than the fallen angels?

I know that there are many things offered toward the satisfaction of a thoughtful person; as, “Who can tell but there are thousands of worlds above us, whose inhabitants are in a better capacity to receive

and improve the instances of Divine Love ; and that this world is but a spot in comparison of them ; and if this whole world should perish, it is but as the hanging up [of] a few malefactors, to show that God is just, as well as merciful?" But how does this solve the difficulty, which is not merely taken from the notion we have of God's merciful nature in itself considered, but from the revelations made thereof unto the children of men in the scripture? about which we cannot have any solid satisfaction, but from things which are obvious before us, not from what is so fully out of our view and knowledge, and concerning creatures of another kind.

It is true, there are some intimations in the sacred scriptures, which, apart and by themselves considered, afford relief; such as these: "The Gentiles, which have not the" written "law, doing the things contained in the law, are a law unto themselves;" by which law they shall at the last be judged, but not by the written law; and who, walking according to this law, will find their conscience to excuse them, as the transgressors thereof shall be under the accusations of conscience. (Rom. ii. 13—15.) Besides, it is said in the foregoing chapter, that the great reason why divine vengeance was against them, was not so much because they "knew not God," or were unacquainted with the methods of salvation; but because, when the Gentiles—who had not Moses nor the prophets for their guide, but only the light of nature, the things made for their help—"they glorified not God as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations." (Rom. i. 21.) And to these considerations if we add what Peter, in Acts x. 34, 35, has, it seems as if many of the Gentiles, who were "strangers to the commonwealth of Israel," were saved; for, saith the apostle, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him;" every one that walketh according to that light [which] he has received, shall be saved. If this be minded without a fixing our thoughts on other scriptural considerations, the difficulty would be removed: but when we reflect on the many other texts that assert Christ Jesus to be the only door to glory; and that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," but that of Jesus Christ; (Acts iv. 12;) and the reason of this doctrine, namely, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" (Rom. iii. 23;) that such is the essential righteousness of God as engageth him to demand satisfaction; and that, unless his justice be satisfied, no salvation can be had; and that there is none other able to satisfy the justice of God, but Jesus Christ, God-Man; and that all who are interested in his merits, must submit unto him;—I say, whoever will consider the foregoing passages with these, will find himself still at a loss. So that, on the whole, I am brought to this result; that is,—that notwithstanding the Spirit of God doth so very much insist on the largeness of Divine Love to the world, the least part thereof are made partakers of it, unless salvation is to be had out of Christ, or unless a very implicit faith be sufficient to entitle the Heathen unto any of

those special blessings that are the purchase of Christ's blood. But when we come so far, if we do but intently mind these things, we shall find ourselves in the dark; and though we have the greatest reason to conclude that these things are reconcilable, yet must we acknowledge that they are above us, they are too "high," we "cannot attain unto" the height thereof. (Psalm cxxxix. 6.)

2. *That such whose lot hath been cast into more pleasant places, and who have had the advantageous helps of sacred scripture for their direction in the way of life, have yet been by Providence plunged into many and inextricable labyrinths of difficulties, is surprising.*—Concerning the Old Testament, who can without surprise converse with the disputes there are among the learned about the Hebrew copy we now have, or the Septuagint? as, whether the former or the latter is more authentic, and must be taken for the canon. There are some momentous differences between them; and therefore it is our concern to inquire after that which is to be our rule. If it be the Septuagint, we are at a loss about its rise; for it is well known that the Greek is not that language which the Holy Ghost used with Moses and the prophets. It is but a translation; but where is the original? Besides, whatever is said by some of the Fathers concerning the miraculous agreement of the seventy-two Israelites sent from Jerusalem to Ptolemy, as translators of the law of the Jews, it is manifest enough out of Aristæus (of whom the learned Usher has writ so much) that they only translated the law of Moses, and no more: neither is it very difficult to show that the LXX. [which] we now have, is more novel than that of the New Testament.

But if the Hebrew must be taken for the canon, yet, as to the books of Moses, some are at a loss whether the Samaritan or the Hebrew be most authentic. But whether the one or the other, it is still queried whether we have the autograph. Yea, we are still in a labyrinth, not only about the various readings, the *keri* and the *chetib*, but about the antiquity of the points,—whether they are co-eval with the letters, or not. The points are so necessary toward the right understanding the true import of a Hebrew word, that without them it is not easy to find out the true sense of the text; the least alteration of a point makes an unaccountable change in the signification of the words. Notwithstanding which, the novelty of the Hebrew points doth now take with many; whereby we are still at a loss where to find a firm foundation on which our faith may lean: for, seeing the sense of the text so very much depends on these points, if these points are of late and human rise, so is the present sense of the scripture; and if so, how can our faith, which is grounded on the sense of scriptures which leans only on this human invention, be divine and unshaken?

But might these difficulties be removed, yet, as to the greatest number of professed Christians, there are others which to them are as insuperable; for they understand not the original, and have for their guidance and conduct no other help but what either some ignorant or profane priest affords them. Such is the neglect [which] the greatest part of Christendom is guilty of, that where there is one

learned and pious minister to direct, there are two who are either very ignorant or scandalous: for which reason the greatest part of the people who are under the ministers' conduct, are either to receive help from the ignorant, who cannot relieve them; or from the scandalous, who cannot be confided in. How can the people put any trust in the honesty and truth of such who are strangers to nothing more than to such virtues?

There is very much [that] may be said to solve these phenomena; but yet, when all that can be offered has been insisted on, we shall find somewhat in the providence that doth transcend our understandings.

3. I will mention only one providence more that does greatly amaze and astonish many that do truly fear the Lord; and that is this; namely, *Although it be frequently asserted in scripture, that to the godly the promise of the good things of this life, as well as of that to come, is given, (1 Tim. iv. 8,) yet we find the godly to be without them, even when the wicked, who know not God, do abound.*—"Many are the afflictions" and tribulations "of the righteous." (Psalm xxxiv. 19.) They are hated, reproached, and "counted as sheep for the slaughter." (Psalm xlv. 22.) But the wicked—they "live, become old, and are mighty in power. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them." (Job xxi. 7—9.) "They are not in trouble as other men;" namely, as the godly; "neither are they plagued like" them. (Psalm lxxiii. 5.) Surely "there be" some "just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous." All which does plainly show, that no man can "find out the work that is done under the sun; though a wise man seek to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it;" (Eccles. viii. 14, 17;) though there may be some seeming solutions given, yet still somewhat will appear insoluble, and to transcend our understandings.

Having thus shown particularly that there are some doctrines and providences which transcend our understandings; that is, they are so deep and profound, so high and much above us, that we may all with the apostle cry out, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"—I say, having shown thus much, I will now proceed to show how we may graciously improve these doctrines and providences. In doing which, I will attempt to be as plain and practical as I can.

#### THE IMPROVEMENT.

III. *That we may graciously improve these doctrines and providences,* we must consider what may be offered toward the quieting [of] our minds, the establishing [of] our faith, the silencing [of] the foolish arguings of our corrupt hearts, and the humbling [of] ourselves. May our minds be quieted, and our hearts established in the



truth; may the vain arguings of corrupt hearts be silenced, and we brought to an humble deportment in all our conversation toward God, notwithstanding all these difficulties that are so transcending; the improvement will be great. I will therefore distinctly handle these particulars, showing that the very transcendency of these doctrines and providences calls for these several improvements.

## IMPROVEMENT I.

The first improvement must be an essay for *the quieting* [of] *the mind*.—The transcendency of these doctrines and providences, the insuperable difficulties in them, do generally perplex the minds of men: we cannot comprehend the deep things of God, and are therefore troubled; our minds are greatly disquieted within us. The first improvement, then, that we must endeavour to make of these transcendencies is, to get the mind into a quiet, calm, and sedate frame. For which end I will, even from the transcendency of these things, propose some

## CONSIDERATIONS.

CONSIDERATION I. The first consideration for the quieting [of] our mind is this: *That, even in these transcendent doctrines and providences, we may behold the footsteps of God's transcendency and incomprehensible greatness, whereby we are engaged to conclude [that] they are of God.*—The which are so admirably ordered, that we may see that they are suited and adjusted unto the make of man for his good. When I consider the transcendency of God, the infinity of him in every perfection, I cannot but be abundantly satisfied to behold the footsteps and impresses thereof in the things that are before me; especially when I also find that all is so excellently well-suited to man for his good, that, as God makes a display of his glory, so he doth discover the greatness of his goodness, even unto us. This great and mighty God, making man for himself, for his own honour and glory, cannot glorify himself by man, but in a way *like himself*; that is, in a way infinitely above us, in a way that transcends our narrow understandings. Whence it is that all those revelations or doctrines that are with reference to this great end,—as are all the mysterious doctrines of our religion, and all those providences that contribute to the bringing it to pass,—are so much above us.

It is true, God did not only design his own glory in these transactions with men, but also our good; and therefore it is that those doctrines and providences that are adjusted to these ends, are in some respect suited to our capacity; how else could they be for our good? If in all respects they should be infinitely above us, we should not be able to apprehend any thing of them; and then they could be of no use unto us. And as they are suited to our capacity, even so they are such as bear on them the signatures and impresses of that great God from and by whom they are, and for whose glory designed. If we believe that there are any transactions between God and man, we must entertain this opinion concerning these doctrines and providences

that are designed for the bringing them to pass. They must be so manifest and obvious unto us, as to direct us concerning what is necessary to be done on our part toward the obtaining [of] the great ends; and also such as bespeak them to be of God; that is, there must be somewhat in them so high and profound as to be beyond us.

Whoever will but intently observe the things that are before us, whether in the natural or moral world, will find somewhat plain and within our compass, and other things to us dark and obscure, transcending our understandings: the which is to show, that all things that proceed from God are designed both for our good and the illustrating [of] the glory of him from whom they proceed. They are designed partly for our good; and therefore [are] partly within our compass: they are also intended to show forth the glory of God; and therefore in them there is somewhat infinitely above us, transcending our capacities. The which being so, it is not very difficult to show what improvement we may make of what transcends us. Yea, we may hereby learn to make as gracious improvement of what is obscure, as of what is more plain and obvious. For, hereby, to the great satisfaction of our souls, we see much of God in these doctrines and providences. Their transcendency is a demonstration that they are of God.

It is remarkable, that in the most mysterious doctrines and providences there is somewhat apprehensible by us, enough to oblige us to conclude that there is no implication in the doctrines, nor any inconsistency between one and another. They are not contrary unto our reasons; neither are the providences such, but that, what difficulty soever about them lies before us, they are not unworthy of God: only we cannot see how, without all scruple, to satisfy ourselves concerning some things of lesser moment with relation unto them. We cannot say that the doctrines and providences are such as in their own nature are incapable of a solution; but this only we can say, We know not how to solve them. There is somewhat in them that is above us; the which does but show that they are from God. If the doctrines and providences had been in all respects plain and obvious, how could it appear [that] they had been of God? Surely, what things soever are in all respects easily within our compass, cannot be supposed to be from One infinitely above us. Wherefore, then, that the world may see that the Author of Christian doctrines and providences is God, God has left some characters and ideas of himself upon them, the which may be observed in every thing that is of God. In those very things that are most known unto us, if well looked into, we shall find somewhat extraordinary, the reason of which we cannot with any satisfaction fully discover; for there is still in them somewhat beyond us.

We may know that this or the other thing is, and what it is; but *how* it is so or so, we know not. This is true of things in the natural world: we know that this is, and what it is; but cannot distinctly show *how* it is what it is, or *how* it possibly should be what it is. We know we see, and what we mean when we say, "We see;" but yet

if we will not believe that we do see, until an hypothesis be laid down, on which, without any scruple, all the many phenomena, or "difficult appearances," that arise from the consideration *how* we see, [may] be solved, we shall never believe we do see. It is true, we know that we see by the eye; but *how* by the eye, is the difficulty. The eye and the object are at a distance; they must be so, if we will see by the eye: but *how*, by what medium, are they brought together? Is there an emission of somewhat from the eye, or an intro-reception of any thing that may be supposed to pass from the object to the organ? Whether the one or the other, is it corporeal or incorporeal, material or immaterial? Not the latter; for what is incorporeal, immaterial, cannot convey the species to the eye: nor what is corporeal, for many other reasons. Whoever will consult the old, and especially the new, philosophers, may see how much is discoursed on this subject, and how little to satisfaction. The like of hearing, of motion, &c.

In philosophy, for this very reason,—namely, because God has left some ideas or footsteps of himself on the things that are made,—there are variety of hypotheses, but not one that can solve every phenomenon, or "difficult appearance." That of Aristotle is now exploded by most; the old Epicurean *dogmata*, revived by Peter Gassend, and the almost-forgotten hypotheses of some others,—of which we have but some scraps in Cicero, Laërtius's "Lives of the Heathen Philosophers," and others,—improved by Des Cartes, are all insufficient for the designed end. Des Cartes can neither answer what is objected against him by Gassendus, nor can Gassendus solve every difficulty that Cartes has cast in his way.

This is so manifest as that there is hardly a great wit but is in one thing or other finding fault with what is urged by others, as insufficient; setting up, as he apprehends, somewhat more plausible: and thus it will be *ad infinitum*, unless the learned of the world satisfy themselves with this; namely, that in all the works of God, how plain soever, there is somewhat of God to be seen in them that is infinitely above us, and not to be comprehended by us.

If this then be so in the natural world, how much more may we suppose it to be so in the moral world, in which it pleaseth the Lord in a more especial manner to make discoveries of himself! The moral system does after a more lively manner contain the portraiture of the divine perfections; and therefore in it there must be somewhat that is more above us than in the natural. We know gospel-doctrines and providences that do transcend our capacity; we know what the doctrines are, and we know that there is reason enough to conclude that these doctrines and providences are of God: and an additional argument to confirm us in this judgment is, that they are above us; there are the marks and signatures of infinity and incomprehensibility upon them. But shall the very thing that is designed as an argument to evince that they are of God, move us to conclude that they are not of him? If there had not been somewhat extraordinary, somewhat in these things above us, we might doubt concerning their being of God; but now there is no place left for such doubtings. Besides, we must con-

sider that the doctrines that fill our minds with various thoughts, being clearly revealed in scripture, though not easily understood, are still to be embraced; for it is their being about "the deep things of God," that occasions their being so far above us. They are about the eternal counsels and purposes of the Most High, the acts and operations of Him who is incomprehensible, the contrivances of fallen man's salvation in a way consistent with the glory of every attribute, &c. All which are matters so grand, that it would be impossible for any finite capacity to comprehend them; much more so for such imperfect worms as ourselves. The doctrines, being about these deep points, must needs be above us, as the subject-matter about which these doctrines are, is above us. The transcendency, then, of these doctrines should afford satisfaction unto us, as it bespeaks them to be of God. God utters things like a God, when he reveals these profound and mysterious doctrines.

The like may be said of the providences. God acts like himself, as well as speaks like himself: yea, and God acts like himself in all his works of providence, as well as in the works of creation; yea, in the works of gubernation, as well as in those of conservation. We cannot comprehend how our beings are conserved; for it is done by God: neither can we understand how the world is governed; for it is God that governs, ordering all things according to the exactest rules for his own glory. Whence if, in the administration of this government, some difficulties which transcend our understandings do occur, it is an argument that God governs the world like God, in infinite wisdom, and therefore in a way much above us; and therefore our minds may be quiet and at rest about these things.

CONSIDER. II. The second consideration for quieting our minds is, *That the transcendency of these doctrines and providences does very much contribute to the exciting and stirring up those graces, in the exercise of which God is glorified in the salvation of some.*—Whoever will duly observe what may be known of God by the discoveries that are made of him, and what the make of man is, will find that God, when at first he created us, had a regard to his own glory, and man's salvation in the exercise of religion. Whence it is that God formed man after his own image, and gave him a law that may be considered as the transcript of his own purity and holiness, and yet such as was suited to those powers and faculties which were at first given us; and that man was no sooner created, but a holy law was given him, and the promise of life on his obedience. The law given is no other than the will of the great God, who made us all; which will must be made known and revealed unto man, before it can have on him the force of a law.

Now the discoveries of God's will are after a two-fold manner; for there are some other discoveries than these that are by the light of nature. What may be understood by the light of nature from the things made, is done by the exercise of our reason; but what is revealed any other way, is not received the same way with the former. Our knowledge of these revelations depends, not solely on the exercise

of reason, but principally on the exercise of faith. It is God who after an extraordinary manner has revealed his will; and therefore it is on the truth of his testimony [that] we must lean for the knowledge thereof. That is, we must believe, we must exercise faith; by the exercise whereof we come to the knowledge of those things which we could not arrive unto merely by the exercise of our highest reasonings. And really God delights to try and exercise our faith; so that now especially, since the fall, the life and heart of that religion that is necessary to salvation consist in the exercise of faith. To be "truly religious," and to be "a sound believer," are expressions of one and the same import. The religion [which] we are designed for and must now exercise, if we will be saved, is the life of faith, which is a life much higher than that of mere reason; for by faith we know what by mere reason we could never know.

If we consider the most momentous points of our religion, we shall find that as they are adjusted to our own capacities, even so they are of matters infinitely above us; they are of matters that are not within our view, unto the knowledge of which we cannot come but by some special revelation: the certainty of which revelations depends on the veracity and truth of God's testimony; and it is our faith alone by which we receive these discoveries that are thus given us of God; whence it is that, the stronger our faith is, the more we glorify God by believing the truth of his testimony. And that we may thus glorify God, it hath pleased the Lord so to order the revelations of his mind and will, and so to dispose of things by his providence, as to pose our reason, and leave us in the dark; at which time, if we lean on the veracity and truth of God's testimony about the doctrine, and on his wisdom and righteousness about his providence, we discover the strength and firmness of our faith, to the glory of God.

1. These things being so, it is manifest that the many profound doctrines that are in scripture, and the many dark providences that attend us, do very much contribute to our living the more religiously; that is, to our walking the more by *faith*, to the saving [of] the soul. This, I conceive, is one great end of the profoundness of the doctrines of religion, and of the many difficulties in the providences of God; namely, to raise us up to a life above sense and reason, even to the life of faith, which is a high and a heavenly life. The more the difficulties that lie in the way of our believing, the more strong is the faith that is exercised; and the stronger our faith, the more God is glorified by us, and the more is our salvation furthered: the which being so, we have great reason to be abundantly quickened in our thoughts.

If we consider the nature of faith, we shall find that mysterious doctrines and providences are very necessary for the engaging us to apply ourselves to the exercise of it.

(1.) "*Faith is the evidence of things not seen.*" (Heb. xi. 1.)—The evidence not only of unseen future glories, but the evidence of somewhat else, not within the view of our sense or reason. Faith doth evidence unto the believer the reality and certainty of the

promises about spiritual blessings to be enjoyed in this life, and doth clearly show unto him that these blessings promised are real, and shall most assuredly be enjoyed. Yea, though there are, in the eye of our sense and our natural reasonings, some impossibilities between us and the inheriting [of] the promises, yet even then faith sees the accomplishment not only possible, but certain and sure.

By faith we believe and receive those truths which, though clearly enough revealed, yet are so much above our capacity that we cannot otherwise embrace them.

By faith we believe that the promise shall be, when we cannot see *how* it can be. Thus was the faith of Abraham exercised: he believed when his sight and reason failed him. Abraham was a hundred years old and, as it were, dead; Sarah barren, and now, according to all rules of natural reason, past child-bearing. Notwithstanding all which, the promise being made that Sarah should bear a son, Abraham believes. He could see how this could be by faith; though he could not see how it could be by his reason. According to his own reasonings, his hopes were gone; but being "strong in faith, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief," but had a hope above hope, "being fully persuaded that, what God had promised, he was able also to perform." (Rom. iv. 18—21.) The like also when God commanded Abraham to offer up his son, his own, his only son, Isaac, whom he loved, and of whom the promise was: "For in Isaac shall thy seed be called;" but nevertheless Abraham is commanded to kill him for a sacrifice. But here is the difficulty:—if Isaac be slain while so young as he then was, even before he had any child, how could the promise be fulfilled? Abraham must kill him, and yet believe that he should live, that he might be the father of many nations; but how could this be? Surely this transcended his understanding,—but not his faith; for he believed "that God was able to raise him from the dead." Therefore it is said, "By faith Abraham, when he was tempted, offered up Isaac: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." (Heb. xi. 17—19.) Time would fail to mention Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and many others, who, when surrounded with dark dispensations, by believing gave glory to God. Then faith is in a special manner acted and exercised, when the believer is compassed about with a cloud of difficulties. When, in the doctrines that, being plainly revealed, are to be believed, there is somewhat above our reason; and when, in the providences with which we meet, there is somewhat very dark, they seeming to thwart the doctrinal discoveries that are made of the will of God unto us; then is the time to act faith. That is not faith which does carry us no higher than our own scanty reasonings. To believe no more than we can comprehend with our own reason, is too low a thing to deserve the name of "faith." Faith is a more noble and raised grace, by which a man believes when his reason is at a loss.

What is here said of faith is a great truth, and, if duly weighed, will afford relief to such as are perplexed with the profoundness

of some doctrines, &c. For by this it is manifest that the mysteriousness of the doctrines, the surprising manner in which they are revealed, the difficulties about the Hebrew points, and some instances in chronology, the various readings, and the like,—they all serve as a spur to our faith, and a furtherance to our salvation.

We have arguments enough to convince us of the truth of scripture, the certainty of a Divine Providence; and therefore we ought not to be unbelieving, though we meet with some difficulties that our reason cannot overcome. This should satisfy us,—that how great soever the difficulties may be, how far soever they transcend our understandings, yet there is in them no implication; and if so, they are in themselves reconcilable; and although finite worms are not acquainted with the true methods of conciliation, yet God, who is infinite in all perfections, is. These difficulties should not in the least stumble our faith, but rather engage us to be the more strong in believing.

(2.) As by faith we behold the accomplishment of the promises which are not comprehended by our reason, and can, through the mysteriousness of doctrines and providences, see that they are of God; so *by faith we are enabled to put our trust and confidence in God, even when under the darkest dispensations.*—Faith never appears so much in its lustre as when the greatest difficulties lie before it. Then it is that the believer puts his trust in the power, wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness of God, *when* under the obscurest dispensations. When there are some difficult appearances in the sacred scriptures that relate to some doctrines, and when some providences seem to be contrary to the discoveries that are made of God's faithfulness, &c.; then it is that our faith appears in its beauty: for thereby we show the just apprehensions [that] we have of God's power, wisdom, mercy, and faithfulness. That God has promised to extend his compassions to believers, that he will order all things to work together for their good, is evident enough in scripture; but yet, notwithstanding this, all things seem to be against them. They are afflicted and under sore temptations; they lose their temporal estates, are deprived of their liberty, are sick, weak, and in great distress; several thwarting providences attend them; all things are seemingly against them. Thus it was with good old Jacob: he is bereaved of his children: "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not," and Benjamin must be taken away. "All these things," says he, "are against me." (Gen. xlii. 36.) But yet this was the time for Jacob to exercise his faith; as he did in the following chapter, verse 14: as if he had said, "The Lord Almighty be with you; with him I leave you; to him I commit my concerns. 'If I be bereaved, I am bereaved.'" That is, "The will of the Lord be done." Thus it was with Job. God had suffered the tempter to break in upon him; God himself seemed as if he was resolved [that] he should die: and yet then could Job say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job xiii. 15.) So with Habakkuk: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; though 'the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat;'"

though "the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places." (Hab. iii. 17—19.)

Many other instances might be given, all which concur to evince that *then* is the time to put our trust in the Lord, *when* we are in the dark, and can see no light. When there are in the providences of God somewhat above us, that we cannot reach unto; then it is that we are to look unto a "Rock that is higher than" ourselves; (Psalm lxi. 2;) then are we called to put our trust in the wisdom and mercy and faithfulness of Him who hath promised to be with us, to uphold and support us. As said David: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in" the Lord; (Psalm lvi. 3;) for though "my flesh and my heart fail, yet God will be the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." (Psalm lxxiii. 26.) On the other side, when, at the sight of "the prosperity of the wicked," the believer's "feet were almost gone," and his "steps had well-nigh slipped," (verse 2,) it is his confidence in God that is then his stay. The providences of God in this instance are remarkable: for though God had said, that the wicked "shall not prosper," nor "live out half their days;" (Jer. xx. 11; Psalm lv. 23;) yet, behold, they live, and "their houses are safe from fear;" (Job xxi. 9;) they "prosper in the world; they increase in riches." (Psalm lxxiii. 12.) How is this consistent with the threatening? or how can the righteous see this, and not be troubled? Surely when they enter into the sanctuary, they see the end of all, and are abundantly satisfied: their faith is hereby tried; but yet they can say, "Good is God to Israel." (Verse 1.) They begin to reason with God, and will say, "Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" but still conclude that the "Lord is righteous." (Jer. xii. 1.) Though "clouds and darkness are round about him," yet "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." (Psalm xvii. 2.) For, notwithstanding all the dark dispensations, the godly do still put their "trust in the Lord," they "stay" themselves on his wisdom, power, mercy, and faithfulness: (Isai. l. 10:) the doing which, all should endeavour, when under dark dispensations.

2. Hereby the grace of *patience* is to the glory of God held up in a continued exercise. Patience is not to be considered to consist merely in an enduring [of] the conflict of temptations and afflictions with a quiet, calm, and sedate temper of spirit; but also in a quiet waiting for, and expectation of, the accomplishment of some great and glorious promises, in looking and patiently waiting for the end, when we shall see with much clearness what now lieth in the dark and out of our view. "But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it," saith the apostle. (Rom. viii. 25.)

Now there seems to be some inconsistency between doctrine and doctrine, between some doctrines and providences, yea, and between providences and providences; but yet we must conclude that it is not



so ; and that the time will come, when our Lord will not speak any more in parables unto us, when the veil shall be done away, and when we shall find every thing to answer the truth and holiness of God, no inconsistency in any of the doctrines and providences, but the exactest agreement and most excellent harmony, every one doctrine and providence concurring to the illustration of each other : all which shall be seen with great satisfaction when we shall depart hence, and be with the Lord. "Now we know" but "in part ; we see" but "through a glass, darkly : but then we shall know even as we are known, and see face to face ;" (1 Cor. xiii. 12 ;) the veil shall be taken away. It is true, even *then* somewhat will transcend our understandings, for the reasons suggested in the first consideration. We must not think that God can divest himself of his Divinity, or make any thing that has not in one regard or other some impresses that discover its Author to be infinite : neither must we imagine that man shall cease to be man, or cease to be a finite wight ; neither hope that his capacity shall be enlarged to comprehend Infiniteness. But this we may safely conclude,—that we shall know more hereafter than now, and that the present darkness with which we are now surrounded is no more than what is suited to the state in which we now live. They that are born of God, are encompassed with those remainders of old corruptions which greatly indispose us for the receiving greater light.

There is an admirable order to be observed in the works and providences of God. First, that which is natural ; then, that which is spiritual : first, that which is less perfect ; then, that which is more perfect : first, a dark evening ; then, a glorious morning : first, star-light, that is, light shining in dark places ; then, the Day-Star from on high, the Sun of Righteousness, arises to enlighten our darkness : first, the knowledge the world had of God and Christ was very little ; then, some shadowy representations were made of heavenly truths ; and now the image, but not yet the heavenly things themselves. Under the law was the "shadow" of heavenly things ; that is, a draught of heavenly things in water-colours : now, the "image" of heavenly things ; (Heb. x. 1 ;) that is, a more lively representation or portraiture of them. Under the law there was a veil over the people's faces ; they could see but the shadow : "But we all, with open face," that is, with a face unveiled, "behold the glory of the Lord ;" but "as in a glass," in which we have but the image ; (2 Cor. iii. 18 ;) for Christ, though he brought us a clearer discovery of things, yet considered our state, and therefore spake but of "earthly things ;" (John iii. 12 ;) that is, the discovery that now we have is very dark to what it shall be in heaven, when we are capable of receiving heavenly discoveries, and look into the heavenly things themselves. Now we see that the discoveries that are made unto us are of God ; for the signatures of Infinite Wisdom are found on them : but then the discovery will be more full, more clear, distinct, and satisfying. Now we know but just enough to quicken us to look for further knowledge about the doctrines and providences of God ;

and the more we know, the more we desire to know; and such as have formed any right conceptions about them, cannot but conclude [that] there is somewhat excellent in the knowledge of these things: and though, the more we pry into them now, the more unsatisfied we are, because we know no more; yet this is some relief,—that we shall know more hereafter; whence it is, that a judicious and understanding Christian is the more inclined to leave this dark state, looking for that state of vision in which we shall know and see more of God, his ways and workings.

Really there is an extraordinary satisfaction that will attend us in that state, wherein we shall be filled with as much and as distinct a knowledge as our understandings are capable of receiving: the which satisfaction is too great a happiness for sinful mortals here; it is a felicity reserved for hereafter.

The like may be said of the providences of God; which may be considered as a curious work, a part of which only is within our view; and because we see not the whole, we are at a loss concerning what we see; for we find most of the several parts that are before us, to be without any order or comeliness: the which must necessarily be so, because it is but a part of the work that we see, and the beauty, which is the result of that admirable connexion that is to be between part and part in the putting all things together, cannot be seen till the end of all, for which we must both hope and patiently wait.

It is true, many instances can be given, wherein the several parts of providence, with respect to this or the other godly man, seem very strange and surprising; and yet, put together, render the highest satisfaction. Joseph was a good man, and had a right to the promise that “all things should work together for his good;” (Rom. viii. 28;) but yet, if you consider some providences relating to him distinctly, you will find all things against him; namely, that he should be sold by his brethren; that he should be carried into Egypt; and, when in Potiphar’s house, be falsely accused by his mistress, and cast into prison, and there continue for a long time. But yet put these providences together, and you will see what dependence the one had on the other, and how all are joined together for Joseph’s advancement; for, had not Joseph been sold by his brethren, how could he have been brought down to Egypt, and placed in the capacity of a servant with Potiphar? And if he had not been with Potiphar, how could he, by the false accusation of his mistress, be imprisoned? And if not imprisoned, how could he have had the opportunity of interpreting the chief butler’s dream, which was the occasion of his being called before Pharaoh, by which means Joseph was so highly advanced as to be made ruler over all the land of Egypt? Many other instances might be given; but this is sufficient to show that the great reason, why many providences so far transcend our understandings that we cannot find out the consistency, the admirable order and harmony, that is in them, is this; namely, we see not the end. If we could see the end, we should have a fuller satisfaction; but till then we must patiently wait.

By this it is evident that the transcendency of these doctrines and providences is an excellent expedient to excite those graces that are necessary to salvation ; and therefore our minds may very well be quieted about it. So much to the first improvement : I will proceed to a second.

#### IMPROVEMENT II.

The second improvement is this : *We may from the transcendency of these doctrines and providences fetch an unanswerable argument to confirm and establish us in the truth of the Christian religion.*—From what has been already urged for the quieting of our minds about these insoluble difficulties, it was shown that the transcendency that is in these doctrines and providences was but the footsteps of God's transcendency. Let us, then, but take this for granted, and compare the impresses or footsteps that there are of God's transcendency in these doctrines, with those on the things that are made, and [those] to be seen in the providences of God ;—I say, compare the doctrines of the gospel, the things made, and his providences, together ; and we shall find an excellent harmony between them, even in this respect,—that the footsteps of God's transcendency are to be seen in them all. (Rom. i. 20.) Whence we have as satisfying an argument to convince us that the doctrines of the gospel are from God, and consequently true, as that the world was created by him, and is now under his government. Yea, such as believe a Providence, and the scripture to be the word of God, have as much to offer for their faith as the mere deist (who only believes the existence of a God) has for his ; for the very same characters, signatures, impresses, and footsteps of God's infinite perfections that are on the things made, are in these doctrines and providences ; of which, the transcendency that is in them is an uncontrollable evidence. Why do we believe the world to be made of God, but because we see that the things made are so admirably framed and ordered, that there is somewhat in them incomprehensible by us ? They are made by One whose wisdom is infinite, and transcends our largest capacities. In like manner, those who will look into the scriptures, and consult the doctrines of the gospel, will find that there are the impresses of infinite wisdom in them ; which could not be, unless they had been of God, who is infinitely wise. Whence it is that, by the transcendency that is in the doctrines, we are engaged to conclude that they are true ; that is, we are hereby confirmed and established in the truth of the Christian religion, that is discovered unto us in the holy scriptures.

#### IMPROVEMENT III.

The third improvement is this : *The transcendency of these doctrines and providences proves a most excellent expedient to silence and stop the mouths of the ungodly ; for, by the transcendency of some doctrines and providences, God is carrying on the great end of glorifying his righteousness in the letting-out his fury and indignation on the*

*vessels of wrath.*—God, who made all things for himself, will be glorified either *by* or *upon* the people [whom] he has made : God will be glorified *by* some to their salvation, and *upon* others in their condemnation. And by the transcendency that is in the doctrines and providences, both are done : for the transcendency of these doctrines and providences, as hath been already shown, exciting the faith and patience of some, does farther their salvation ; and as they are stumbling-blocks in the way of others, they occasion the ruin and destruction of others. These transcendent doctrines and providences must be considered as stumbling-blocks that God puts in their way ; not that there is any evil in God's putting them in the way, but the evil is only from the indisposition of the corrupt heart of man.

For the clearer understanding [of] which, we must consider that there is certainly such a decree as that of the election of some particular persons unto glory ; which doth necessarily infer the dereliction of others, the leaving them in a state of sin and misery. Some, being “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,” shall, “through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, obtain salvation with eternal glory.” (1 Peter i. 2 ; 2 Tim. ii. 10.) But others there are, even “ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness,” and “who were of old ordained to this condemnation.” (Jude 4.)

The salvation of some, the damnation of others, is acknowledged by all to be certain as to the event ; and that there is no event in time but what was foreknown of God from eternity, is not denied by any that believe God to be God ; and that these events cannot be without a providence of God, is most manifest. It is true, God has a greater influence on the elect than on others : for God does not only support their powers and faculties, and by a physical efficiency enable them to perform what is natural in their moral actions ; but moreover God does by his mighty power in infinite wisdom sweetly determine the elect to the doing what is morally good and savingly gracious. God does not so much in such actions as are sinful and vicious : the moral vitiosity or obliquity that is in a sinful action is not of God ; though what is natural in a sinful action has its origin and rise from God, yet what is moral and vicious is not from God. God does not physically and invincibly determine any man to what is sinful in any action ; the sinfulness of an action has no higher being than a creature for its author. However, though the sins of the damned are without a Divine physical Predetermination, yet not without a Divine Providence. There is no event without a providence of God : as all events are according to the foreknowledge of God, so they are *by* his providence. The destruction of Pharaoh in the Red Sea [was] according to the foreknowledge of God ; and the hardness of his heart, that was the cause of his ruin, was by God's providence. This providence is somewhat more than a mere unconcerned permission, and yet much less than a physical predetermination. It falls short of this latter, because God has no physical

influence on the sinfulness of our actions : and it is more than the former ; for the wisdom and power of God are marvellously exercised in doing very much toward the bringing [of] the event to pass, and that by laying stumbling-blocks in the way of the non-elect ; which stumbling-blocks in our way may *occasion* our sin and ruin, but not *cause* it. So that, although the Lord does lay “stones of stumbling” in our way, which occasion our sin, yet he cannot be said to be the Cause or Author of our sin. No one is the cause or author of another’s sin, but he who does either physically or morally contribute to the commission of sin ; but though God lays “stones of stumbling” before the sinner, yet he does not, in doing so, either morally by persuasions draw, or physically impel and drive, him to the sin. The stumbling-block is before him, and from it the sinner takes occasion to sin against the Lord. Though such is the infinite knowledge and wisdom of God, that he foreknows that such a block in the sinner’s way will occasion his sin, and notwithstanding puts it in his way ; yet he is not therefore the Author of his sin, because God does not hereby either physically or morally move the sinner to the sin ; for, the sinner having a natural power to withstand it, it is his wilfulness and sin [that] he does not.

That God does lay stones of stumbling before us, is evident enough to any who will consult the sacred scriptures. In Ezekiel iii. 20, it is said that God doth “lay a stumbling-block before” the man who was externally righteous, and he “turns from his righteousness” unto sin, and dies in his iniquity. This will appear more convincingly in the instances I will give concerning it.

The discoveries that are made of God’s gracious designs toward us, are about such matters as do amaze us. Whoever will consider what is declared in the gospel concerning the way to eternal life, will find that Jesus Christ, though he be God as well as Man, and, as God, is infinite in all perfections, yet he suffered a veil to be on his Divinity, “and took upon him the form of a servant.” (Phil. ii. 7.) His birth was very mean, as appears by the circumstances of it ; his education under his parents, no way splendid : “Is not this the carpenter’s son ?” (Matt. xiii. 55 ;) his converse among poor fishermen ; and he at length “became obedient unto the death of the cross.” (Phil. ii. 8.) He was “a man of sorrows,” and very contemptible in the eye of the world ; (Isai. liii. 3 ;) whence it is that he is “unto the Jews,” who expected a Messiah to come with worldly grandeur, “a stumbling-block.” (1 Cor. i. 23.)

In like manner are the many profound doctrines of the gospel stones of stumbling. Christ, that is, the doctrines of Christ,—not only such as relate to the meanness of his person, but many others,—are as “stones of stumbling and rocks of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.” (Isai. viii. 14, 15.)

For this very reason, I humbly conclude, there are so many *δυσνοητα*,

“things hard to be understood,” in the scriptures; so many difficulties about the original, the various readings of scripture, &c. Yea, for this reason do many wicked men increase in riches: they have much silver and gold; but it is a stumbling-block unto them, even “the stumbling-block of their iniquity.” (Ezek. vii. 19.) Their very tables are “made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompence unto” the wicked. (Rom. xi. 9.) O, how many do take occasion, from the several difficulties that lie before them in the word of God and in his providences, to reject all religion, to the eternal destruction of their own souls! The which is done to the exaltation of the glorious righteousness of God, that is seen in the condemnation of “the vessels of wrath,” who were “endured with much long-suffering.” (Rom. ix. 22.) And all this by the signal providence of God, which is concerned in the accomplishment of these high ends, yet so that the purity and holiness of God appear as glorious as do his justice and righteousness: for God, who lays these stumbling-blocks before us, does not cause our sin; for that only follows our meeting them in our way, as the product of our own corruption.

It is admirable to consider, that the very same thing that is a mean to excite grace in the one, should be an occasion of infidelity and other sins in another; that such contrarities should in different ways proceed from one and the same providence; that one and the same thing should be a mean of the salvation of the one, and the occasion of the destruction of the other. There is much of infinite wisdom to be seen in this contrivance; for hereby, in the very same thing that proves an occasion of the ruin of the non-elect, there is enough to stop their mouths, and silence them and all such as do take occasion therefrom to sin against God. For, whatever the secret counsels of God are concerning this or the other particular person, God does treat all in a way suitable to those capacities [which] he has given us; he considers us all as rational creatures, as moral agents; and has taken us all under his government; and is as sincere in the promises of life [which] he makes unto all on their compliances with his terms, as he is just and true in the execution of the threatened evils against such as remain obstinate transgressors. And as for the insuperable difficulties that lie before us, the doctrines and providences that transcend our understandings, they are as excellent expedients to engage us to believe to the saving of the soul, as they are the occasions of that unbelief that ends in the damnation of those that perish.

Wherefore, then, seeing this is so, seeing so much good may be gathered from these doctrines and providences, such as take occasion from them to sin, to reject all religion, and live atheistically in the world, are without excuse: for it is manifest that a better use might have been made of these things, and that it is their own sin that they have made so ill an use thereof; the which will not in the least excuse, but aggravate, their misery, and justify God in their condemnation.

## IMPROVEMENT IV.

Fourthly. *We may hence learn to entertain more awful apprehensions of the greatness and majesty of God, and more low thoughts of ourselves.*—Such is the boldness of most men, that they fear not to pry into those things that are above them, even into the secrets of the Most High. We are not satisfied with what is revealed, but are too curiously searching into “the hidden things of God.” Although it is impossible that this curiosity should be attended with the desired success, and although it proved fatal to our first parents, who, desiring to know more than was meet, fell from that happy state in which they were at first placed; yet the temper of most studious inquirers is, to be too curious and bold; and this they will be, though they turn the whole world into confusion by their contests.

It is not unworthy our thoughts to consider what is the principal ground of the many quarrels and wranglings that have been and are among the learned; for then we shall find that a too bold inquiry into the things that are above us and unlawful to be pried into, is the ground of all. There is in us an ambition to be like unto God; we would fain know as much as He who is omniscient; our souls, though, in their own nature, [they] are finite, yet in the desires they have of knowing things are in a manner infinite. “The deep things of God” cannot escape our narrowest search; the nature of his being, the modes and *media* of his operations, and his eternal counsels, fall under our strictest scrutiny and boldest debates.

It is strange to consider with what confidence vain mortals will dispute about these things; and no less surprising to observe the great confusion and disorders that have followed such disputes. How confidently do the Dominicans and Molinists, the Scotists and Durandists, and other Schoolmen, among the Papists,—the Remonstrants and Anti-Remonstrants, the Supra- and Sub-lapsarians, among Protestants,—talk of God, his decrees, and their order, as well as about physical predetermination, &c. ! Among all which there are different opinions in one respect or other; but yet, by all, one and the same unpardonable confidence [is] discovered in adhering to their own *dogmata*: for about these abstruse points they are all as resolute in their determinations, as in matters most plain and obvious; the tendency of which hath been nothing less than strife, contention, and endless quarrels, yea, strange animosities and confusions. Whereas, if we did but seriously consider that all these matters are above us, that they transcend the largest capacities, and therefore are not to be pried into, instead of spending our time and strength about them, we should be engaged to entertain more awful apprehensions of the greatness of God, and lower thoughts of ourselves.

What more manifest, than that there are some doctrines and providences which transcend our understandings? or than that we are but feeble and impotent beings, who cannot search them out? This is not only supposed in our question, but has been already evinced in

this discourse. And is it so? Is there such a transcendency in the doctrines and providences of God? Is there somewhat secret, somewhat above us? And yet shall we, by an unjustifiable curiosity in prying into these secrets, presume on God? What! dost thou not consider, that God is infinitely above thee, that he dwelleth in that light that no eye can approach unto, that his throne is in the heavens, and that there are "clouds and darkness round about him," and that his glory is inaccessible? Why then art thou not afraid to come too near him? Why darrest thou to fix thine eye upon him?

The transcendency of the doctrines and providences of God is his glory, which no eye can see and live; and yet presumest thou to desire a sight thereof? Behold! when a glimpse of the glory of the Lord appeared but in the face of Moses, the people could not bear it; and therefore a veil was put on his face: (Exod. xxxiv. 29—35 :) and art not thou as unable to behold the glory itself, as the Israelites were to fix their eye on a glimpse of it? Consider, the shinings of Moses's face represent unto us the beauty and lustre and bright glory that is in the doctrines of God. So great was the light of gospel-doctrines then, that the children of Israel could not bear it; and therefore it pleased the Lord, in compassion to human weaknesses, to give them but "the shadow of heavenly things." The glorious light of those doctrines was under the veil; it was hid under types and ceremonies; so that they had but some darker representations, such as they could bear. And now, though we are enabled to bear more, and accordingly have clearer discoveries of this glorious light, yet, not being able to bear the light itself, the heavenly things themselves, we have but the image. Though the veil is not such as hides from us so much of the glory as the Jewish types did, yet the veil that is over the glory now is such as keeps us from seeing it as it is. The truth of which is confirmed unto us by the transcendency [that] we now find in these doctrines: there is a cloud between somewhat in them, and us; and therefore we cannot find them fully out: the which being so, it should teach us to consider our own state and condition, how weak and feeble we are, and what reason we have to be humble and modest in all our inquiries about these things.

Could we but believe that the transcendency that is in the doctrines and providences of God, is what indeed it is,—an unanswerable argument to confirm us in the truth of this point; namely, that there is an inaccessible glory in those doctrines and providences, even that light which we are not able to bear, or to behold and live,—we should see cause to entertain more grand, august, and awful apprehensions of God, as well as lower thoughts of ourselves; and then, instead of disputing boldly about these transcendencies, we should find reason enough to acknowledge our own frailty and weakness, and in the sense thereof to be humble and modest in all our disquisitions. Alas! what is man, that he should come so near the ark of God, or dare make too near approach unto the mount that burns, and is covered with a cloud of smoke and great darkness?



Whoever will duly consider how that man, when in innocency, was mostly disposed to close with the temptation of being like unto God in knowledge, and that the Lord, ever since the fall, hath taken special care to keep us very much in the dark, may easily see that the use [which] we are to make of the transcendency of the doctrines and providences of God, is to walk humbly before the Lord, and to be afraid to inquire too curiously after his secrets. When Adam was first created, his knowledge was much more full, clear, and distinct than afterwards it was; and no question but that it afforded him suitable delight and satisfaction. He saw so much excellency in the knowledge of God and his works, that a temptation to the doing [of] any thing but what might increase his knowledge, would with the greatest disdain be contemned and rejected. This the subtle tempter saw, and therefore recommends the forbidden fruit, as what was rather to be chosen as a means of enlarging his knowledge, than as what was pleasing to the taste: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Gen. iii. 5.) Adam, finding so much pleasure in the knowledge he already had, is soon tempted to be inordinate in the desiring [of] more; yea, so inordinate, that, as soon as he meets with the temptation, no knowledge less than what was like unto God's, could satisfy him: and so he fell. So that the sin of our first parents was an ambition to be like unto God in knowledge, an inordinate desire of knowing what could not be known by any but by Him whose understanding is infinite. And this sin appears in all his offspring: we would fain be like unto God, and we are unwilling to be satisfied with such measures as the Lord appoints, and therefore are prying into "the deep things of God." Such are our low thoughts of God, and such are the high thoughts we have of ourselves, that we think it not impossible to know God to perfection, and therefore are so curious and strict in our inquiry after him.

But it has pleased the Lord to show himself to be God, and that we are but men, by the wonders [which] he hath wrought on earth. Hence proud man, in aspiring after more knowledge than was meet, has lost what he formerly had: his understanding is darkened, his heart is blinded, he cannot see. The faculties of his soul, though they remain, yet [are] not in their primitive strength and vigour; they are greatly impaired and corrupted: yea, the enlightened minds of the regenerate have in them such remainders of old corruption as unfit them for receiving all that may be known of God. And ever since the fall, the method [which] God has taken in enlightening men is such as may convince us that we are but men, finite worms, who cannot comprehend the infinite glories of the Lord. For it has pleased the Lord to give unto the children of men some darker representations of himself; and in those revelations that are most plain and clear, there is enough to demonstrate that there is somewhat in every doctrine and providence that is above us. God keeps his distance; he will make us know that he is the Lord, and that we are but men, even vain worms, that cannot comprehend him, and who

therefore ought to submit ourselves unto God, and humble ourselves before him, and not come too near him; for the nearer we come, the more we are in the dark, the more at a loss, yea, the more perplexed and confused are our apprehensions. This the transcendency of the doctrines and providences of God does evince; which is enough to show how humble we ought to be when we discourse of God, and how modest in our inquiries into his doctrines and providences.

Content thyself, therefore, with what is clearly revealed, and leave what is hid and above thee unto God. Be not thou so bold as to measure the boundless mysteries of God by thy narrow, confined understanding; neither do thou presume to reject what thou canst not comprehend. What is of God is above thee: for God is God; he is clothed with honour and majesty, and with that light which is inaccessible. We ought, therefore, to be modest when we speak of the unsearchable doctrines and providences of God: for in them we see enough to admire, but can never comprehend; and when we have spent all our time to "find out God," and the infinity of his being, the mystery of the Trinity, the mode of his workings or operations, the depth of his contrivances about the accomplishing [of] fallen man's salvation, and all the great counsels of God, and the intricacy of his providences, we must come to this close, with the apostle: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"