

in leaving the world and all things that are here, and desiring to take God for our portion. O when shall there be such a holy and divine captivity of all the desires of our spirits, as to have them taken up in the consideration of him, who is mercy, and love, and goodness!

Now to him who is love, be praise in heaven and earth. Amen.

SERMON IX.

MAL. iii. 6. *For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.*

IT is an unchangeable and irrevocable statute of heaven, that cannot be recalled, that as long as we are here below in the land of our exile, being strangers from our Father's house, we must live by faith, and not by sight. Therefore we must submit unto these dark discoveries of those things that we have, that are most precious and excellent, until that day shall be, when faith, that is the evidence of things not seen, shall sweetly be changed into an immediate beholding of them. And O what a blessed day shall that be, when faith and hope shall both cease, and give way to sight! when these two cardinal graces shall go to take their leave of us, and sense shall go in, and we then shall eternally solace ourselves in beholding of him that is now invisible; and sense shall solace itself in these sweet fruits and trophies of the victory of faith and hope! O the infinite satisfaction and joy these have, that have their dwelling there! such new wine as they drink of, must not be put into such old bottles as we are, else we would burst asunder. 'But new wine must be put into new bottles, that both of them may be preserved.' And if he would condescend to draw by a lap of that vail, where-with he is now covered from our eyes, and that he should now appear in the glory of his unspeakable Majesty, we should all fall dead at his feet, and there should no more strength remain with us. It were a question difficult to determine, whether the most pleasant manifestations that God can give of himself to his own, whilst they are here below, should provoke more joy than reverence, and more fear than rejoicing? And sure we are, fear of him who is that unchangeable Majesty, is more suitable for us whilst we are here, than to rejoice and be glad. O that unsuitableness we are under, which renders us so incapable, were once removed, and taken out of the way, and we for ever advanced to that unspeakable dignity, 'as to see him as he is!' We must say by the way, O what is that one word, 'To see God as he is?'

We must delay the exposition of it, until we have the pos-

session of it. There is more, no doubt, in that word, than angels can make language of. If those of the higher-house were commanded to write a commentary of this one promise, 'That we shall see God as he is;' they might close all their expositions of it to us in this, *Come and see*; he can best resolve you himself. Now all that we have been formerly speaking of God, and of his blessed attributes, which is the main scope and design, that at least we ought to propose in speaking of so divine and profound a name is, 'That you might be once persuaded to study and exalt him, before whom all the inhabitants of the world are reputed as nothing, and who rules in the kingdoms of men, *were many of us* but driven from among men unto beasts, till seven times pass over us, and we made to acknowledge God to be the most high,' we might acknowledge his justice, and show forth his praise, which is the supreme end why we had a being. But there are many among us, that go from our being before that we get to know why we had a being; God has given us immortal souls, 'and made us wiser than the beasts of the field;' but there is not one among a thousand that takes up his dignity, and he may take up his lamentation, 'Man being in honour, and knoweth it not, is like the beasts that perish.'

That which we now shall speak of is, that glorious and incomparable attribute of his unchangeableness, a subject more fit for angels to speak of than men; and it is clear in these words, 'I am the Lord, I change not; he is that everlasting rock of ages, that though all things here should stagger to and fro as a drunken man, yet he remains the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever; with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of change.' Changeableness is the note of all things here below: but he takes here to himself a more excellent name, and who can debate that which he hath spoken? 'Though the sun should not give light by day, nor the moon and stars by night, and the sea shall pass its bounds; yet he is that immutable and unchangeable Being with whom there is no changeableness.' O what can changeable man speak of the unchangeable being of God? No doubt; were our spirits under a more divine impression of this attribute, the unchangeableness of God, we might speak to you with more advantage, and you might likewise hear with more rejoicing. But if each of you that are here, were posed with this question, who of you have your spirits under an impression of this attribute of God's unchangeableness? we think there shall be few or none found to give a positive answer to this question. That which proceeds from the heart, affects the man most; and if we did speak, because we knew such, we might often speak less, and wonder more. O to be much taken up in

a divine reflection and meditation upon this glorious attribute, the unchangeableness of God? which is that pillar of hope to which our faith must lean, when sense is lost, and we ready to draw that conclusion, 'that our spots are not like the spots of his people.' And likewise, there is none of the saints from which we can expect help, neither would they answer us, tho' we should call upon them. Then we must solace ourselves quietly upon this rock; often 'we stir him up, and awake him before he please.' But he is willing, and often passes an act of oblivion to all our former offences, and does condescend to drown all the differences betwixt him and us, in that immense love of his good-will. Were God as changeable as we are, how soon should we get a bill of divorcement in our hands, and we should soon dote on other lovers: but when we have lost our grips, and let them go, these everlasting arms of his do take us up. There is an unchangeableness in his decrees that cannot be altered, as it is spoken of the laws of the Medes and Persians; that love of his admits of no period. He doth so graciously condescend to his own, that when they have been playing the harlot with many lovers, yet his unchangeable love doth embrace them, 'return unto me, O Israel! O such a blessed accepting, yet 'return unto me, O Israel?' And such sometimes have been forced to cry out, 'I am not worthy to be called thy son,' &c. And some have supposed, when their prison-doors have been cast open, and when their chains have fallen off their feet, they have supposed with themselves, that they had seen a vision: and others, when they were loosed from their captivity, they have been as men that dreamed. O when that challenge shall be proposed to us, that are like a barren wilderness in all these things that he doth to us, when he shall pose us with that question, 'For which of these good works that I have done to you, do you take up stones against me?' We may confess, and give him that testimony, when we are at ourselves, and have wronged him, as that word, Luke xv. 16, 17. 'And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger?' It is more for our advantage to remain with him, than to go elsewhere. When he hath been desiring us to return, we have wearied ourselves in pursuing after our idols, 'and filled ourselves with love until the morning, and with delight until the dawning of the day.'

Now, for clearing more of this attribute, we would, better for the quality of it, cut off much of the quantity of our discourse about it, that we be not rash with our mouths in the hasty uttering of words. 'By the multitude of words, a fool's

voice is known.' When we do seriously reflect on the unchangeableness of God, that he is such a One, notwithstanding of all his infinite works and varieties of dispensations that comes from him, yet he remains unchangeable. All things remain in a circuit of being, and not being: and even such things, when they have a being, remain unchangeable. Now to speak of his unchangeableness, it is so held forth, that he is void of all variable-ness and corruptness, and that he, in his blessed purpose of his good-will, is void of any shadow of changeableness: he is unchangeable in his essence, in respect of this, that he is void of, and cannot be subject to corruption. The eternity of God doth sufficiently prove his being, that it is impossible for him not to be; that though all things should not be, yet he is to the fore. He takes to himself that glorious attribute, first and last: he taking to himself in that glorious essence, that he is void of all alteration, and infinitely perfect, proves sufficiently his being both sufficient and all-sufficient. Wherein can a man be profitable to God? Neither can his perfections be found out. He is likewise infinite in his omnipotency; no power can be added to him, nor taken away from him. He is likewise infinite in his understanding and knowledge, all things are known unto him from the beginning of the world, he having a most comprehensive and distinct knowledge of all things; and having also a most perfect and sure knowledge, without all reach of error. For these things that occasion error, are altogether removed from him. He is so infinite in understanding, that all things that are, or have been, or shall be, or may be, are as easy to him as these things that are most obvious to, or comprehensive by us. He is likewise unchangeable in his love, John xiii. 1. whom he loves, he loves unto the end. We often, through our misconstructions, think that he stands still, when he is going; like passengers of a ship under sail, think the land moving, and they are standing still. He cannot come short of ability. There is a sweet harmony of God's unchangeableness, in his willing and doing; there is an incapacity of compulsion causing him to act. There are some expressions held forth, as that, Gen vi. 6. 'It repented the Lord that he had made man:' so in 1 Sam. xv. 35. 'And the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel.' That doth not contradict this, being spoken after the manner of man: as likewise these expressions held out in his breach of promise, Numb. xiv. 34. Ye shall know my breach of promise. But these promises are only conditional, not absolute; they rather speak of the difference of the several ways he works; but they do not hold forth any changeableness in him, nor of his eternal purposes. We are persuaded, these are either the gladdest news, or the

saddest that ever were proclaimed in your ears, That God is unchangeable: these are like good news from a far country, or as cold waters to a thirsty soul.' If it were possible, that one of those, who are reserved to the day of the Lord's justice in these everlasting chains, were to give their verdict of this attribute of the unchangeableness of God, no doubt, they might conduce much to move us to set to our seal thereto, he being unchangeable in the exercise of his justice towards them. If their captivity were to endure as long as there are pickles of sand by the sea-shore, they would be some way therein comforted; but it is their eternal misery, that there is no hope to be freed from that everlasting darkness, but when they have spent many millions of years in that pit of darkness, they may say, and cry out, This is but the beginning of our sorrows. Now, if that were believed, that God is unchangeable, we would be making more progression, flying from the wrath to come. It is uncertain to many of you, how soon you may come to a close of your time, and be made to hearken to that everlasting sentence, then ye would take this warning; God is commanding you that question. The gates of the New Jerusalem are standing open, that ye would flee thereunto, lest the avenger of blood overtake you; "and who can stand before him, if once he be angry, who makes the mountains to melt at his presence, and who, at the voice of his word, makes all the pillars of the earth to tremble? We are like to those that sleep upon the top of a mast, we are not afraid of that wrath, that shall seize on all them that obey not the gospel. 'And those that are begotten unto a lively hope, through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are not these good news unto them, that ere it be long, they shall pass into an unchangeableness of life, that these who are taken up now before the throne, are in the enjoyment of him, which they longed so much after? Eternity does not produce the losing of their enjoyment. That is the diamond that shines most brightly in their crown, that he is unchangeable. When shall the one and twenty years of our age come, and that our minority shall pass, and that we may be capacitated to enter into the actual possession of those things that our blessed Lord Jesus is now taking possession of in our name? This is matter of consolation, that though the forty years we are to spend in this wilderness, should be spent in heaviness, yet that we may rejoice in the hope that is set before us, that we shall no more hang our harps on the willow-trees for being in a strange land. O what a glorious appearance shall that be, when all these that are given to our blessed Lord from all eternity, shall be brought to him with raiment of needle-work! Where then the blessed difference betwixt him and us shall clearly appear; surely it is held forth in that word, Rev. xiv.

12. 'His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns.' Many crowns shall be on his head, and only one crown shall be on our head.

Now, we shall point a little at these advantages that a Christian may have in this consideration, that God is unchangeable. There is none almost of all the attributes of God, that conduces so much for a Christian's satisfaction, and for establishing that full assurance of hope, as this of unchangeableness does.

The *first* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is this, it is an excellent way to keep the grace of love growing in the Christian: for when a Christian attains to the divine impression of this, that God loveth him, and that his love is unchangeable, then the grace of love in the Christian is made to grow stronger. But as long as we conceive there is a possibility or probability for him to change, love cannot be strong. Then the Christian attains to that pitch thereof, which many waters cannot quench. We cannot attain unto that pitch of love, until once we get this believed, that God is unchangeable. We confess, that a Christian, after he hath attained unto the solid persuasion of this, that his beloved is his, and he is his; yet it is much to persuade them, that that which they have once attained shall never be lost. We confess, these many debates and questions, after we have beheld the salvation of the Lord, and after we have passed from death to life, makes us pass from the first commandment, 'To love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, strength, and mind, &c.' Then doth it produce much misbelief, the debating of God's unchangeableness. Neither would we have you to take advantage by this of more liberty to yourselves, 'Be not high-minded, but fear; thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.' Paul giveth this direction for proving their election and assurance of their interest in Christ, the study and blessed pursuit of holiness. 2 Tim. ii. 19. 'Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.' And then we have this word added, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' The not knowing what shall be the end of our walking, makes us many days to walk under a cloud.

The *second* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is this, it is an immutable and irresistible way to keep life in the exercise of faith. And we have these four things observable in it. *First*, As in the exercise of faith, when he doth exercise us with some strange and extraordinary dispensation, in a manner calling all our terrors about us, as in a solemn assembly, and that he doth wound us with the wounds of an enemy; then we with Gideon cry out, 'If the Lord were

with us, how could all this evil befall us?' There is much consistency in these two, his love and his dispensations. If we were much in the faith of his unchangeableness, we might see much of his love in such a stroke. And having the faith of his doing all things well, we might see it much for our advantage, even the difficultest of dispensations. We confess, this is a difficulty for these that call in question their interest in him. Another thing herein observable is, when God, in his unsearchable wisdom, doth wrap up himself so, that we are not admitted to have access to him, but are constrained to walk without the sight of the king in his beauty. There are many here, no doubt, might say with Esther, Esther iv. 11. 'It is thirty days since we did behold the king:' yea many of us might cry out with Absalom, 2 Sam. xiv. 28. 'I have been these two years in Jerusalem, and have not beheld the king's face.' This makes us call in question our interest; whereas the faith of his unchangeableness would remove much of this, that though he seem to frown, yet he is unchangeable: and though he seem to withdraw, yet he still beholdeth us. The *third* thing is, the faith of his unchangeableness would make us say, 'My beloved shall yet return, I will yet rejoice in the hope of the God of my salvation:' he shall yet come over the mountain as a young hind: he will be for a door of hope to us, notwithstanding of our distance from him: and our faith is strengthened in his unchangeableness, when we have been going abroad after so many lovers, and forsaken him who was the guide of our youth, and making a diligent enquiry after our idols, making us oft to call in question our hope and interest, and to say, that there is such a woful inconsistency between our walk and hope, that it makes us call in question our reality. This is strange, a doubt, that we are made to call in question our interest! whereas the faith of his unchangeableness would be advantageous to us, that notwithstanding of all our offences, he is still unchangeable. O for the faith to believe that God cannot, nor will not change his immutable purposes! It is contrary to human reason that he should be angry, so as not to change his love: but surely we may say, this is not after the manner of man: though we confess many such things as those have been with him. The *fourth* thing in the exercise of faith, which is strengthened in his unchangeableness is, the entertaining of the motions of his Spirit, and should make us come over all these debates and reasonings whereby we quench his Spirit, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption, and do all that lies in us to break ourselves: these many woful interruptions whereby we have resisted his Spirit, have so weakened our hope, that it makes us often to draw that conclusion, so to say, 'That there

is no more sacrifice for sin.' And if our misbelief ascend not to so high a pitch, yet we sit down as those that have no hope; because that after we tasted of the powers of heaven, 'and have crucified Christ afresh, and put him to open shame;' therefore there is a new entry for having access to him. I confess, a Christian having his faith thus brangled, should not only be under the apprehensions of the unchangeableness of God's love, but likewise of the freeness of his love; and therefore we should take us to this, if we can say no more, 'To study to give glory to God, and so hope against hope, and if we perish, let our ruin be under his hand.'

The *third* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is this, the attaining to much divine patience, and submission under all the sad dispensations, even though in opposition to all that may befall us here. The unchangeableness of God may make us weep under these things, as though we wept not. What though all things should contradict us, and though our acquaintances and friends should flee away from us, and not behold us. O what divine solacing is there in this, 'That God is unchangeable.' Psalm xl. 17. 'I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.' One thought of God toward us, shewing forth himself, 'that he is unchangeable,' may richly make up all our advantages that are waiting us while we are here below. If the most excellent choices, we have hereaway, should be taken from us; yet this is our advantage, that he cannot be taken away; for he is without the reach of being spoiled by the creature. This may make us to be in a holy neutrality and indifferency of all other things, getting once this one thing at a point, that we may subscribe a blank, and put it in his hands, and let him fill it up as he will for those other things, only seek to be at a point of your being owned of him.

The *fourth* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is, we come to the distinct persuasion of the incoming of our elder sister the Jews, Rom. xi. 29. 'The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.' Though your bones should be scattered as about the grave's mouth, yet there is hope of their reviving; folks cannot attain to any persuasion of themselves without the faith of his unchangeableness, that that which they attain unto be committed to him, knowing in whom they have believed.

The *fifth* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is, the mortification of all these things here below. If we were much in beholding his unchangeableness, when we behold things here as transient, and he alone permanent, O how might we be necessitated to be crucified to the world, and

to be pressing on towards him! What a pitch of mortification to the world have some win to by the faith of this, 'that he is unchangeable?' All these vanishing things are made quickly to flee away. David saith, in Psalm xxxix. 6. 'Men walketh in a vain show, they are disquieted in vain.' That which makes him attain to such a length, is the divine apprehension of the unchangeableness of God, in the seventh verse of that Psalm, 'And now Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee: there he solaces himself in God, after he had taken a look of the vanity of all things beside him.

The *sixth* advantage that we have by the consideration of God's unchangeableness, is this, much joy and satisfaction: as is clear, Heb. vi. 18. where the immutability of the counsel of God is brought in, to make the heirs of God to have strong consolation. We are exceeding short of our task, when we are out of the exercise of this attribute of God. O but believers might be without the reach of these things that trouble them, by the meditation of his unchangeableness! When we might be going up to the top of mount Pisgah, and beholding the promised land, and to get our hope and satisfaction of these things more in fruition; no doubt, our misbelief of this makes us walk much in heaviness. The most part of Christians' time is spent in seeking the proof of their interest: I do not condemn their work; but it were a compendious way to study himself, whether for shunning of sin and offences, or walking near unto him. This is a part of conformity to God, to be exercising holiness; and for restraining of sins, to be in the consideration of his justice and omnipotency. We confess this is a depth, but it is such a depth as a Lamb may wade. Here is matter for search and admiration.

Now, to this unchangeable God be everlasting praise, world without end. Amen.



SERMON X.

2 Cor. xii. 7. *Lest I should be exalted above measure, &c.*

WERE it not a pleasant and glorious sight to behold one in the form and likeness of the Son of God walking in the midst of his solemn assemblies? Were it not a pleasant sight to behold the stately and majestic steps of princely Jesus in his sanctuary? But, O! it is a sad dispensation, to preach of an unknown Christ, and to hear of an unknown Christ? And is it not a sad dispensation, when at a communion we feast with a veiled Christ that does not hearken to the voice of our cry? Is it not a sad dispensation to walk with an absent Christ? And is it not much more sad for Christians, to take up Christ as at a distance from