

ever is bitter? This would make us flee from sin, as Moses from the serpent.

2. The serious thoughts of eternal happiness would very much take us off from these worldly things; we should not esteem much of them: what are these sublunary things to eternity? they are quickly gone, they salute us, and take their farewell. But I am to enter upon an everlasting estate; I hope to live with him who is eternal: what is the world to me? They who stand upon the top of the Alps, the great cities of Campania seem as small things in their eyes; so he who hath his thoughts fixed on his eternal state after this life, all these things seem as nothing in his eye. What is the glory of this world? how poor and contemptible, compared with an eternal weight of glory?

3. To conclude; The serious thoughts of an eternal state, either of happiness or misery, should have a powerful influence upon whatsoever we take in hand: every work we do, promotes either a blessed or cursed eternity; every good action sets us a step nearer to an eternity of happiness; every bad action sets us a step nearer to an eternity of misery. O what influence would the thoughts of eternity have upon our religious duties? It would make us do them with all our might: a duty well performed, lifts a Christian higher towards heaven, and sets a Christian a step nearer to a blessed eternity.



## GOD'S UNCHANGEABLENESS.

THE next attribute is God's unchangeableness, Mal. iii. 6. 'I am Jehovah, I change not.' 1. God is unchangeable in his nature. 2. In his decree.

1st, Unchangeable in his nature: 1. There is no eclipse of his brightness. 2. No period put to his being.

1. No eclipse of his brightness: his essence shines with a fixed lustre, James i. 17. 'With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning,' Psal. cii. 27. 'Thou art the same.' All created things are full of vicissitudes: 1. Princes and emperors are subject to mutation. Sesostris, an Egyptian prince, having subdued divers kings in war, made them draw like horses in his chariot, as if he intended to turn them to eat grass, as God did King Nebuchadnezzar. The crown hath many successors. 2. Kingdoms have their eclipses and convulsions: what is become of the glory of Athens? The pomp of Troy? *Jam reges est ubi Troja fuit.* Kingdoms, though they have a head of gold, yet feet of clay. 3. The heavens change, Psal. cii. 26. 'As a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed.'

The matter of the elements, as it is more pure, so more firm and solid; the heavens are the most ancient records, where God hath written his glory with a sun-beam, yet these shall change; though I do not think they shall be destroyed as to their substance, yet they shall be changed as to their qualities; they shall melt with fervent heat, 2 Peter iii. 12. and so be more refined and purified. Thus the heavens shall be changed, but not he who dwells in heaven; 'With him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.' 4. The best saints have their eclipses and changes. Look upon a Christian in his spiritual estate, and he is full of variation: Though the seed of grace doth not die, yet the beauty and activity of it doth often wither. A Christian hath his anguish fits in religion; sometimes his faith is at an high tide, sometimes low ebb: sometimes his love flames, and at another time like fire in the embers, and he hath lost his first love. How strong was David's grace at one time? 2 Sam. xxii. 3. 'The God of my rock, in him will I trust.' And at another time, 'I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.' What Christian can say, he doth not find a change in his graces; that the bow of his faith doth never unbend, the strings of his viol do never slacken? Sure we shall never meet with such Christians till we meet with them in heaven. But God is without any shadow of turning. 5. The angels were subject to change; they were created holy, but mutable, Jude 6. 'The angels which kept not their first estate.' These morning stars of heaven were falling stars. But God's glory shines with a fixed brightness. In God there is nothing looks like a change, no better or worse: no better in him, because then he were not perfect; nor worse in him, for then he should cease to be perfect: he is immutably holy, immutably good; there is no shadow of change in him.

*Object.* *Christ, who is God, assumed the human nature, here was a change.*

*Ans.* If indeed the divine nature had been converted into the human, or the human into the divine, here had been a change, but not so. The human nature was distinct from the divine, therefore there was no change. As suppose a cloud cover the sun, this makes no change in the body of the sun; so, though the divine nature be covered with the human, this makes no change in the divine nature.

*2d,* There is no period put to his being; 1 Tim. vi. 16. 'Who only hath immortality.' The Godhead cannot die: 1. An infinite essence cannot be changed into a finite; but God is infinite. 2. He is eternal, *ergo*, he is not mortal; to be eternal, and mortal, is a contradiction.

*Use* 1. See here the excellency of the divine nature in its immutability: this is the glory of the Godhead. Mutableness de-

notes weakness; it is not so in God, he is the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, Heb. xiii. 8. Men are fickle and mutable, like Reuben, 'unstable as water,' Gen. xlix. 4. They go in changeable colours.

1. They are changeable in their principles, (sometimes protestant, sometimes papist) if their faces altered as fast as their opinions, we should not know them.

2. Changeable in their resolutions; like the wind that blows in the east, presently turns about to the west. They resolve to be virtuous, but quickly repent of their resolutions: their minds are like a sick man's pulse, alters every half-hour; these the apostle compares to waves of the sea, and wandering stars, Jude 13. they are not pillars in God's temple, but reeds.

3. Others are changeable in their friendship, quickly love, and quickly hate; sometimes will put you in their bosom, then excommunicate you out of their favour; thus they change as the camelion, into several colours. But God is immutable.

*Use 2.* See the vanity of the creature; there are changes in every thing but in God, Psal. lxxii. 9. 'Men of high degree are vanity, and men of low degree are a lie.' We look for more from the creature, than God hath put into it. The world brings changes; the creature hath two evils in it; it promiseth more than we find, and it fails us when we most need it: there is a failure *in omni*. A man desires to have his corn grinded, the water fails, and then his mill cannot go; the mariner is for a voyage, the wind either doth not blow, or it is contrary, and he cannot sail; one depends upon another for the payment of a promise, and he fails, and is like a foot out of joint. Who would look for a fixed stability in the vain creature! As if one should build houses on the sand, where the sea comes in and overflows. The creature is true to nothing but deceit, and is constant only in its disappointments. It is no more wonder to see changes fall out here below, than to see the moon dressing itself in a new shape and figure; look to meet with changes in every thing but God.

*Use 3. Comfort to the godly:* 1. In case of losses, if an estate be almost boiled away to nothing; if you lose dear friends by death, here is a double eclipse; but this is the comfort, God is unchangeable; I may lose these things, but I cannot lose my God; he never dies. When the fig-tree, and olive-tree failed, yet God did not fail, Heb. iii. 17. 'I will joy in the God of my salvation.' The flowers in the garden die, but a man's portion remains: so outward things die and change, but, Psal. lxxiii. 26. 'Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'

2. In case of sadness of spirit, when God seems to cast off the soul in desertion, Cant. v. 6. 'My beloved had withdrawn

himself; yet God is unchangeable. He is immutable in his love; he may change his countenance, but not his heart, Jer. xxxi. 3. 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love,' Hebrew, *Gnolam*, a love of eternity. If once God's electing love riseth upon the soul, it never sets, Isa. liv. 10. 'The mountains shall be removed, but my loving-kindness shall not depart from thee, neither the covenant of my peace be removed.' God's love stands faster than the mountains: God's love to Christ is unchangeable; and he will no more cease loving believers, than he will cease loving Christ.

*Use 4. Of exhortation.* Get an interest in this unchangeable God, then thou art as a rock in the sea, immoveable in midst of all changes.

*Q. How shall I get a part in this unchangeable God?*

*Ans.* By having a change wrought in thee, 1 Cor. vi. 11. 'But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified.' Whence we are changed, *a tenebris ad lucem*, so changed, as if another soul did live in the same body; by this change we are interested in the unchangeable God.

Trust to this God only, who is unchangeable, Isa. ii. 22. 'Cease from men; leave trusting to the reed, but trust to the Rock of ages.' He that is by faith ingarrisoned in God, is safe in all changes? he is like a boat that is tied to an immoveable rock. He that trusts in God, trusts in that which cannot fail him; he is unchangeable, Heb. xiii. 5. 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' Health may leave us, riches, friends may leave us; but, faith God, I'll not leave thee; my power shall support thee; my Spirit shall sanctify thee; my mercy shall save thee: I will never leave thee. O trust in this unchangeable God. God is jealous of two things, of our love, and of our trust: He is jealous of our love, lest we love the creature more than him; therefore he makes it prove bitter: and of our trust, lest we should place more confidence in it than him, therefore he makes it prove unfaithful. Outward comforts are given us as baits by the way to refresh us, but not as crutches to lean on; if we make the creature an idol, what we make our trust, God makes our shame. O trust in the immortal God. We, like Noah's dove, have no footing for our souls, till we get into the ark of God's unchangeableness, Psal. cxxv. 1. 'They that trust in the Lord, shall be like mount Sion, which cannot be removed.'

God is unchangeable in his decree; what he hath decreed from eternity is unalterable, Isa. xli. 10. 'My counsel shall stand.' Argument, that God's eternal counsel or decree is immutable: If God changed his decree, it must be from some defect of wisdom or foresight in God: for that is the reason why men do change their purposes: through a want of foresight,

they see something after, which they did not see before : but this cannot be the cause why God should alter his decree, because his knowledge is perfect, he sees all things in one entire prospect before him.

*Object.* *But is not God said to repent ? There seems to be a change in his decree, Jonah iii. 10. 'The Lord repented of the evil that he said he would do unto them.'*

*Ans.* Repentance is attributed to God figuratively and improperly, Num. xxiii. 19. 'He is not man that he should repent.' There may be a change in God's work, but not in his will : God may will a change, but not change his will. "God may change his sentence, but not his decree." As suppose a king shall cause a sentence to be passed upon a malefactor whom he intends to save ; notwithstanding this sentence, the king doth not alter his decree : so God threatened destruction to Nineveh, Jonah iii. 4. but the people of Nineveh repenting, God spared them ; here God changed his sentence, but not his decree ; it was what had lain in the womb of his purpose from eternity.

*Object.* *But if God's decree be unchangeable, and cannot be reversed, then to what purpose should we use the means ? Our endeavours towards salvation cannot alter his decree.*

*Ans.* This decree of God doth not take off my endeavour ; for he that hath decreed my salvation, hath decreed it in the use of means ; and if I neglect the means, I go about to reprobate myself. No man argues thus : God hath decreed how long I shall live, therefore, I will not use means to preserve my life, not eat and drink. God hath decreed the time of my life in the use of means ; so God hath decreed my salvation in the use of word, prayer, sacraments : and as a man that refuseth his food murders himself, so he that refuseth to work out his salvation doth destroy himself. The vessels of mercy are said to be prepared unto glory, Rom. ix. 23. How are they prepared, but by being sanctified ? and that cannot be but in the use of means ; therefore let not God's decree take thee off from holy endeavours. A good saying of Dr. Preston, "Hast thou an heart to pray to God ? it is sign no decree of wrath has passed against thee."

*Use 1.* If God's decree be eternal and unchangeable, then God doth not elect our faith foreseen, as the Arammans, Rom. ix. 11, 14. 'The children being not yet born, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, it was said, Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.' We are not elected for holiness, but to holiness ; Eph. i. 4. If we are not justified for our faith, much less elected for our faith ; but we are not justified for it : we are said to be justified through faith as an instrument, Eph. ii. 8. but not for faith as a cause ; and, if not

justified for faith, then much less elected : God's decree of election is eternal and unchangeable, therefore depends not upon faith foreseen, Acts xiii. 48. ' As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed.' They were not elected, because they believed, but they believed because they were elected.

*Use 2.* If God's decree be unchangeable, it is comfort in two cases, 2. Concerning God's providence towards his church. We are ready to quarrel with providence, if every thing doth not jump with our desire : remember God's work goes on, and nothing falls out but what he hath decreed from eternity. 2. God hath decreed troubles for the church's good ; the troubling of God's church is like the angels troubling the water, John v. 4. which made way for healing his people. He hath decreed troubles in the church ; ' His fire is in Sion, and his furnace in Jerusalem,' Isa. xxxi. 9. The wheels in a watch move cross one to another, but they all carry on the motion of the watch : so the wheels of providence often move cross to our desires, but still they carry on God's unchangeable decree, Dan. xii. 10. ' Many shall be made white.' God lets the waters of affliction be poured on his people, he doth but lay them a whitening. Therefore murmur not at God's dealings ; his work goes on, nothing falls out but what he hath wisely decreed from eternity ; every thing shall promote God's design, and fulfil his decree.

2. Comfort to the godly in regard of their salvation, 2 Tim. ii. 19. ' The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth who are his.' God's counsel of election is unchangeable : once elected, and for ever elected, Rev. iii. 5. ' I will not blot his name out of the book of life.' The book of God's decree hath no errata in it, no blottings out : once justified never unjustified, Hof. xiii. 14. ' Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.' God never repents of his electing love, 1 John xiii. 1. ' He loved them to the end.' Therefore, if thou art a believer, comfort thyself with this, the immutability of God's decree.

*Use 3.* To conclude, a word to the wicked, who march furiously against God and his people : let them know, God's decree is unchangeable, God will not alter it, nor can they break it ; and while they resist God's will, they fulfil it. There is a twofold will of God, *Voluntas præcepti et decreti* ; the will of God's precept, and of his decree. While the wicked resist the will of God's precept, they fulfil the will of his permissive decree. Judas betrays Christ, Pilate condemns him, the soldiers crucify him, while they resisted the will of God's precept, they fulfilled the will of his permissive decree, Acts iv. 28. Such as are wicked, God commands one thing, they do the quite contrary ; to keep the sabbath they profane it ; while they disobey

his command, they fulfil his permissive decree. If a man set up two nets, one of silk, the other of iron, the silken net may be broken, not the iron: God's commands are the silken net; while men break the silken nets of God's command, they are taken in the iron net of his decree; while they sit backward to God's precepts, they row forward to his decree; his decree to permit their sin, and to punish them for their sin permitted.



## OF THE WISDOM OF GOD.

THE next attribute is God's wisdom; which is one of the brightest beams of the Godhead, Job ix. 4. 'He is wise in heart.' The heart is the seat of wisdom; *Cor in Hebraeo sumitur pro judicio*, Pineda. Among the Hebrews, the heart is put for wisdom, Job xxxiv. 34. 'Let men of understanding tell me:' in the Hebrew 'let men of heart tell me.' God is wise in heart, that is, he is most wise: 1. God is only wise; he doth solely and wholly possess all wisdom; therefore he is called 'the only wise God,' 1 Tim. i. 17. All the treasures of wisdom are locked up in him, and no creature can have any wisdom, but as God is pleased to give it out of his treasury. 2. God is perfectly wise; there is no defect in his wisdom. Men may be wise in some things, but in other things may betray imprudence and weakness. But God is the exemplar and pattern of wisdom, and the pattern must be perfect, Matth. v. 48. God's wisdom appears in two things, 1st, His infinite intelligence. 2dly, His exact working.

1. His infinite intelligence. He knows the most profound, abstruse secrets, Dan. ii. 28. He knows the thoughts, which are the most intricate subtil things, Ainos iv. 13. 'He declareth to man what is his thought.' Let sin be contrived never so politicly, God will pull off all masks and disguises, and make an heart-anatomy. He knows all future contingencies, *et ante intuitu*, all things are before him in one clear prospect.

2. His exact curious working. He is wise in heart; his wisdom lies in his works. These works of God are bound up in three great volumes, where we may read his wisdom.

1. The work of *creation*. The creation, as it is a monument of God's power, so a looking-glass in which we may see his wisdom. None but a wise God could so curiously contrive the world. Behold the earth decked with variety of flowers, which are both for beauty and fragrancy: the heaven bespangled with lights; we may see the glorious wisdom of God blazing in the sun, twinkling in the stars. His wisdom is seen in the marshalling and ordering every thing in its proper place and sphere: