

of our reason. Reason thinks God must go such a way to work, or the business will never be effected. This is to limit God to our reason: whereas he is infinite, and his ways are past finding out, Rom. xi. 33. In the deliverance of the church, it is a limiting God, either to set him a time, or prescribe him a method for deliverance. God will deliver Zion, but he will be left to his own liberty; he will not be tied to a place, to a time, to an instrument: this were to limit him, and then he should not be infinite. God will go his own way, he will pose and nonplus reason, he will work by improbabilities, he will save in such a way, as we think he will destroy; now he acts like himself, like an infinite wonder-working God.



## OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

‘FOR the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by his actions are weighed,’ 1 Sam. ii. 3. Glorious things are spoken of God; he transcends our thoughts, and the angels praise. God’s glory lies chiefly in his attributes, which are the several beams by which the divine nature shines forth. Among other of his orient excellencies, this is not the least, ‘The Lord is a God of knowledge; or as the Hebrew word is, ‘A God of knowledges.’ Through the bright mirror of his own essence, he hath a full idea and cognisance of all things; the world is to him a transparent body. He makes an heart-anatomy; Rev. ii. 25. ‘I am he which searcheth the reins and the heart.’ The clouds are no canopy, the night is no curtain to draw between us and his sight, Psal. cxxxix. 12. ‘The darkness hideth not from thee.’ There is not a word we whisper, but God hears it, Psal. cxxxix. 4. ‘There is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.’ There is not the most subtil thought comes into our mind, but God perceives it, Isa. lxxv. 8. ‘I know their thoughts.’ Thoughts speak as loud in God’s ears, as words do in ours. All our actions, though never so subtilly contrived, and secretly conveyed, are visible to the eye of omniscience, Isa. lxxvi. 18. ‘I know their works.’ Achan hid the Babylonish garment in the earth, but God brought it to light, Josh. vii. 21. Minerva was drawn in such curious colours, and so lively penciled, that which way soever one turned, Minerva’s eyes were upon him; so, which way soever we turn ourselves, till God’s eye is upon us, Job xxvii. 16. ‘Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds; the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?’ God knows whatever is knowable; he knows future contingencies. He foretold Israel’s coming out of Babylon, and the virgin’s conceiving. By this

the Lord proves the truth of his Godhead against idol-gods, Isa. xli. 23. 'Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know ye are gods.' The perfection of God's knowledge is primary. He is the original, the pattern and prototype of all knowledge; others borrow their knowledge of him; the angels light their lamps at this glorious sun. (2.) God's knowledge is pure. It is not contaminated with the object. *Divina natura non est immista rebus aut fordibus inquinata*, August. Though God knows sin, yet it is to hate and punish it. No evil can mix or incorporate with his knowledge, no more than the sun can be defiled with the vapours which arise from the earth. (3.) God's knowledge is facile; it is without any difficulty. We study and search for knowledge, Prov. ii. 4. 'If thou seekest for her as for silver.' But the lamp of God's knowledge is so infinitely bright, that all things are intelligible to him.

(4.) God's knowledge is infallible; there is no mistake in his knowledge. Human knowledge is subject to error and misprision. A physician may mistake the cause of a disease: but God's knowledge is unerring; he can neither deceive, nor be deceived; he cannot deceive, because he is truth; nor be deceived, because he is wisdom. (5.) God's knowledge is instantaneous. Our knowledge is successive, one thing after another. We argue from the effect to the cause. God knows things past, present, and to come, *una intuitu*, at once, they are all before him in one entire prospect.

(1.) God's knowledge is retentive; he never loseth any of his knowledge; he hath *remiscentia*, as well as *intelligentia*; he remembers as well as understands. Many things elapse out of our mind, but God's knowledge is eternized. Things transacted a thousand years ago, are as fresh to him, as they were done but the last minute. Thus he is perfect in knowledge.

Object. *But is it not said, Gen. xviii. 21. I will go down and see whether they have done according to the cry which is come up unto me, and I will know?*

Ans. It could not be a nesciency, or that God was ignorant; because there is mention made of a cry; but the Lord speaks there after the manner of a judge, who will first examine the cause before he passeth the sentence. God, when he is upon a work of justice, is not in a riot, as if he did not care where he hits; but he goes in a way of circuit against offenders 'He lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, Isa. xxviii. 17.

Object. *Hos. xiii. 13. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up, their sin is hid?*

Ans. Not that his sin was hid from God, but his sin is hid; that is, it is recorded, it is laid up against a day of reckoning,

That this is the meaning, is clear by the foregoing words, his iniquity is bound up: as the clerk of the assizes binds up the indictments of malefactors in a bundle, and, at the assizes, brings out the indictments, and reads them in court; so God bind's up men's sins in a bundle, and, at the day of judgment, this bundle shall be opened, and all their sins brought to light before men and angels.

That God is thus infinite in his knowledge: 1. It cannot but be so; for he, who is the original cause, and gives a being to things, must needs have a clear inspection into them, Psal. xciv. 9. 'He that planteth the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?' He who makes a watch or engine, knows all the workmanship in it. God, that made the heart, knows all the motions and fallacies of it: He is like Ezekiel's wheels, full of eyes, and, as Austin saith, *Totus oculus*, "All eye." 2. It ought to be so: for he is to be 'Judge of all the world,' Gen. xviii. 25. There are so many causes to be brought before him, and so many persons to be tried, that he must have a most exquisite perfect knowledge, or he could not do justice. An ordinary judge cannot proceed without a jury, the jury must search the cause, and give in their verdict; but God can judge without a jury. He knows all things in and of himself, and needs no witnesses to inform him. A judge judgeth only matters of fact, but God judgeth the heart. He not only judgeth wicked actions, but wicked designs. He sees the treason of the heart, and punisheth it.

*Use 1.* Is God infinite in knowledge, 1 John i. 5. 'He is light, and in him is no darkness;' then how unlike are they to God, who are darkness, and in them is no light, who are destitute of knowledge, such as the Indians who never heard of God? And are there not many among us, who are no better than baptized heathens? who are to seek in the first principles of the oracles of God. It is sad, that after the sun of the gospel hath shined so long in our horizon, yet to this day the veil should be upon their heart. Such as are enveloped with ignorance, cannot give God a reasonable service, Rom. xii. i. "Ignorance is the nurse of impiety:" The schoolmen say, *Omne peccatum fundatur in ignorantia*. Jer. ix. 3. 'They proceed from evil to evil, and know not me, saith the Lord.' Where ignorance reigns in the understanding, lust rageth in the affections; Prov. xix. 2. 'That the mind be without knowledge, it is not good; neither faith nor fear: no faith; for knowledge carries the torch before faith. Psal. ix. 10. 'They that know thy name shall put their trust in thee.' A man can no more believe without knowledge, than the eye can see without light. Nor fear of God; how can they fear him whom they do not know! The covering of Haman's face was a sad presage of

death. When people's minds are covered with ignorance, this covering of the face is a fatal forerunner of destruction.

2. If God be a God of knowledge, then see the folly of hypocrisy. Hypocrites do not *virtutem facere*, but  *fingere*. Melanct. They carry it fair with men, but care not how bad their hearts are; they live in secret sin, Pf. lxxiii. 11. 'They say how doth God know?' Pf. x. 11. 'God hath forgotten, he hideth his face, he will never see it.' But, Pf. cxlvii. 5. 'His understanding is infinite: He hath a grate [*crates*] that looks into men's breasts, he hath a key for the heart, he beholds all the sinful workings of men's spirits; as in a glass-hive we can see the bees working in their combs, Mat. vi. 4. 'He sees in secret; *in impios habet*, Rivet. As a merchant enters down debts in his book, so God hath his diary or day-book, and he enters down every sin into the book: he makes a critical descant upon men's actions. Jeroboam's wife disguised herself that the prophet should not know her; but he discerned her, 1 Kings xiv. 6. 'Why feignest thou thyself to be another?' The hypocrite thinks to prevaricate and juggle with God, but God will unmask him, Eccl. xii. 14. 'God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing,' Jer. xxix. 32. 'They have committed villany in Israel, even I know, and am a witness, saith the Lord.' Ay, but the hypocrite hopes he shall colour over his sin, and make it look very specious. Absalom masks over his treason with the pretence of a religious vow. Judas dissembles his envy at Christ, and covetousness, with the pretence of 'charity to the poor,' John xii. 5. Jehu makes religion a stirrup to his ambitious design, 1 Kings x. 16. But God sees through these fig-leaves. You may see a jade under his gilt trappings, Jer. xvi. 17. 'Their iniquities are not hid from mine eyes.' And he that hath an eye to see will find an hand to punish.

*Use 2. Of exhortation.* Is God so infinite in his knowledge? Then we should always set ourselves as under his omniscient eye. *Sic vivendum est tanquam in conspectu*, Seneca. Let us set David's prospect before our eye, Psal. xvi. 8. 'I have set the Lord always before me.' Seneca counselled Lucilius, that whatever he was doing, he should imagine some of the Roman worthies before him, and then he would do nothing dishonourable. The consideration of God's omniscience would, 1. Be preventive of much sin. 'The eye of man will restrain from sin; and will not God's eyes much more? Esth. vii. 8. 'Will he force the queen before me, when I stand and look on?' Will we sin when our judge looks on? Would men speak so vainly, if they considered God over-heard them? Latimer took heed to every word in his examination, when he heard the pen go behind the hangings: so, what care would persons have of their

words, if they remembered God heard, and the pen is going in heaven? Would men go after strange flesh, if they believed God was a spectator of their wickedness, and would make them do penance in hell for it? Would they defraud in their dealings, and use false weights, if they thought God saw them, and for making their weights lighter would make their damnation heavier? 2. The setting ourselves as under the eye of God's omniscience, would cause reverence in the worship of God. God sees the frame and carriage of our hearts when we come before him! how would this call in our straggling thoughts? How would this animate and spirit duty? It would make us put fire to the incense, Acts xxvi. 7. 'The tribes instantly served God day and night,' *omnibus venibus*, with the utmost zeal and intenseness of spirit. To think God is in this place, he beholds us, would add wings to prayer, and oil to the flame of our devotion.

2. Is God's knowledge infinite? Study sincerity, be what you seem, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. 'The Lord looketh upon the heart,' Men judge of the heart by the actions, God judgeth of the actions by the heart; if the heart be sincere, God will see the faith and wink at the failing. Aſa had his blemishes, but his heart was right with God, 2 Chron. xv. 17. God saw his sincerity, and pardoned his infirmity. Sincerity in a Christian, is like chastity in a wife, which doth excuse many failings. Sincerity makes our duties acceptable, like musk among linen, that perfumes it. As Jehu said to Jehonadab, 2 Kings x. 13. 'Is thy heart right with me? And he said, It is. If it be, said, he, give me thy hand; and he took him up into the chariot:' so, if God see our heart is right, that we love him, and design his glory, now faith he, give me your prayers and tears; now you shall come up with me into the triumphant chariot of glory. Sincerity makes our services to be golden, and God will not cast away this gold though it may want some weight. Is God omniscient, and his eye chiefly upon the heart? Wear this girdle of truth about you, and never leave it off.

*Use 3. Of comfort.* Is God a God of infinite knowledge? Then there is comfort, 1. To the saints in particular, 2. To the church in general, in three respects.

1. In case of private devotion, Christian, thou settest hours apart for God, thy thoughts run upon him as thy treasure: God takes notice of every good thought, Mal. iii. 17. He had a book of remembrance written for them that thought upon his name. Thou enterest into thy closet, and prayest to thy Father in secret; he hears every sigh and groan, Psal. xxxviii. 9. 'My groaning is not hid from thee.' Thou waterest the seed of thy prayer with tears, God bottles every tear, Psal. lvi. 8. 'Put thou my tears into thy bottle.' When the secrets of

all hearts shall be opened, God will make an honourable mention of the zeal and devotion of his people, and he himself will be the herald of their praises, 1 Cor. iv. 5. 'Then shall every man have praise of God.'

2. The infiniteness of God's knowledge is a comfort, in case the saints have not so clear a knowledge of themselves. They find so much corruption, that they judge they have no grace, Gen. xxv. 22. 'If it be so why am I thus? If I have grace, why is my heart so dead and earthly a frame! O remember, God is of infinite knowledge, he can spy grace where thou canst not; he can see grace hid under corruption, as the stars may be hid under a cloud. God can see that holiness in thee which thou canst not discern in thyself; he can spy the flower of grace in thee, though overtopped with weeds, 1 Kings xiv. 13. 'Because there is in him some good thing.' God sees some good thing in his people, when they can see no good in themselves; and though they judge themselves, he will give them an absolution.

3. It is comfort in respect of personal injuries. It is the saints' lot to suffer; the head being crowned with thorns, the feet must not tread upon roses. If saints find a real purgatory, it is in this life; but this is the comfort, God sees what wrong is done to them; the apple of his eye is touched, and is not he sensible; St. Paul was scourged by cruel hands, 1 Cor. xi. 35. 'Thrice was I beaten with rods;' as if you should see a scullion whip the king's son. God beholds it, Exod. iii. 7. 'I know their sorrows.' The wicked make wounds in the backs of the saints, and then pour in vinegar; God writes down their cruelty. Believers are part of Christ's mystical body; and for every drop of a saint's blood spilt, God puts a drop of wrath in his vial.

4. Comfort to the church of God in general. If God be a God of knowledge, he sees all the plots of the enemies against Zion, and can make them prove abortive. The wicked are subtle, having borrowed their skill of the old serpent; they dig deep, to hide their counsels from God, but he sees them, and can easily counter-work them. The dragon is described with seven heads, Rev. xii. 3. to shew how he plots against the church: but God is described with seven eyes, Zech. iii. 9. to shew, that he sees all the plots and stratagems of the enemies; and when they deal proudly, he can be above them. Come, saith Pharaoh, 'let us deal wisely,' Ex. i. 10. and he never played the fool more than when he thought to deal wisely, Ex. xiv. 23. 'In the morning-watch the Lord looked to the host of the Egyptians, by the pillar of fire, and troubled the host.' How may this be as sap in the vine, and may comfort the church of God in her militant state. The Lord hath an eye in

all the councils and combinations of the enemy ; he fees them in their train, and can blow them up in their own mine.

OF THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

THE next attribute is, ‘ God is eternal,’ Pf. cx. 2. ‘ From everlasting to everlasting thou art God.’ The schoolmen distinguish between *ævum et æternum*, to explain the notion of eternity. There is a three-fold being : 1st, Such a being as had a beginning, and shall have an end ; so all sensitive creatures, the beasts, fowls, fishes ; these at death are destroyed, and return to dust ; their being ends with their life. 2d, Such a being as had a beginning, but shall have no end, as the angels and souls of men ; they are eternal *a parte post* ; they abide for ever. 3d, Such a being as is without beginning, and without ending, and that is proper only to God. He is *semper existens*, viz. from everlasting to everlasting : it is God’s title, a jewel of his crown : (1.) He is called ‘ the King eternal,’ 1 Tim. i. 17. (2.) Jehovah, a word that properly sets out God’s eternity ; a word so dreadful, that the Jews trembled to name or read it ; therefore used another word, Adonai, Lord. Jehovah contains in it time past, present, and to come, Rev. i. 14. ‘ Which is, and which was, and which is to come ;’ it interprets the word Jehovah. (*Which is*) He subsists of himself, having a pure and independant being. (*Which was*) God only was before time. There is no searching into the records of eternity. (*Which is to come*) His kingdom hath no end : his crown hath no successors, Heb. i. 8. ‘ Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.’ The doubling of the word ratifies the certainty of it, as the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream did. I shall prove that God only could be eternal, without beginning. Angels could not ; they are but creatures, though spirits ; they were made ; and therefore their beginning may be known ; their antiquity may be searched into ; if you ask when they were created ? Some think before the world was ; but not so : for what was before time was eternal : the angels’ first rise and original reacheth no higher than the beginning of the world. It is thought by the learned, that the angels were made that day on which the heavens were made, Job xxxviii. 7. ‘ When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.’ St. Hierom, Gregory, and venerable Bede, understands it of the angels, when God laid the foundation-stone of the world, the angels being then created, did sing the anthems of joy and praise ; the angels could not be before time ; for what was before time was eternal. It is only proper to God to be eternal, without begin-