

THE MERCY OF GOD.

THE next attribute is God's goodness or mercy : mercy is the result and effect of God's goodness, Pf. xxxiii. 5. Pf. cxiv. 64. So then this is the next attribute, God's goodness or mercy. The most learned of the heathens thought they gave their god Jupiter two golden characters, when they styled him *Good* and *Great* ; both these meet in God, *Goodness* and *Greatness*, majesty and mercy.

God is, 1. Essentially good in himself. And 2. Relatively good to us. They are both put together, Pf. cxix. 68. 'Thou art good, and doest good.' This relative goodness is nothing else but his mercy, which is an innate propenseness in God, to pity and succour such as are in misery. Concerning God's mercy.

It, I shall lay down these twelve positions, 1. It is the great design of the scripture to represent God as merciful. This is a loadstone to draw sinners to him, Exod. xxxiv. 6. 'The Lord merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness,' &c. Here are six expressions to set forth God's mercy, and but one to set forth his justice : who will by no means clear the guilty, Pf. lvii. 10. 'God's mercy, is far above the heavens,' cviii. 4. God is represented as a King and a rainbow was about his throne, Rev. iv. 23. The rainbow was an emblem of mercy, the scripture doth oftner represent God in his white robes of mercy than with his garments rolled in blood ; oftner with his golden sceptre, than his iron rod.

Position 2. God is more inclinable to mercy than wrath. Mercy is his darling attribute, which he most delights in, Mic. vii. 13. 'Mercy pleaseth him.' It is delightful to the mother, saith Chrysostom, to have her breasts drawn : so it is to God, to have the breasts of his mercy drawn, Isa. xlvii. 4. 'Fury is not in me ;' that is, I do not delight in it. Acts of severity are rather forced from God, he doth not afflict willingly, Lam. iii. 33. The bee naturally gives honey, it stings only when it is provoked ; God doth not punish till he can bear no longer, Jer. xlv. 22. 'So that the Lord could bear no longer, because of the evil of your doings.' Mercy is God's right hand, that he is most used to ; inflicting of punishment is called God's strange work, Isa. xxviii. 21. He is not used to it. And when the Lord would shave off the pride of a nation, he is said to hire a razor, as if he had none of his own, Isa. vii. 20. 'He shall shave with a razor that is hired.' 'He is slow to anger,' Psal. ciii. 28. 'But ready to forgive,' Psal. lxxxvi. 5.

Position 3. There is no condition, but we may spy mercy

in it: when the church was in captivity, she cries out, 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed,' Lam. iii. 22. Geographers write of Syracuse in Sicily; it is so situated, that the sun is never out of sight. In all afflictions we may see some sun-shine of mercy. That outward and inward troubles do not come together, is mercy.

Position 4. Mercy sweetens all God's other attributes: God's holiness without mercy, and his justice without mercy, were terrible. When the water was bitter, and Israel could not drink, Moses cast a tree into the water, and then they were made sweet. How bitter and dreadful were the other attributes of God, did not mercy sweeten them! Mercy sets God's power on work to help us; it makes his justice become our friend; it shall avenge our quarrels.

Position 5. God's mercy is one of the most orient pearls of his crown: it makes his Godhead appear amiable and lovely: When Moses said to God, 'I beseech thee shew me thy glory;' the Lord answered him, 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will shew thee mercy,' Exod. xxxiii. 19. God's mercy is his glory; his holiness makes him illustrious; his mercy makes him propitious.

Position 6. Even the worst taste of God's mercy; such as fight against God's mercy, taste of it: the wicked have some crumbs from mercy's table; 'The Lord is good to all,' Psal. cxlv. 5. The sweet dew drops on the thistle, as well as the rose. The diocese where mercy visits is very large: Pharaoh's head was crowned though his heart was hardened.

Position 7. Mercy coming to us in a covenant is sweetest: it was mercy that God would give Israel rain, and bread to the full, and peace, and victory over their enemies, Lev. xxvi. 4, 5, 6. But it was a greater mercy that God would be their God, ver. 12. To have health is a mercy, but to have Christ and salvation is a greater mercy; this is like the diamond in the ring, it casts a more sparkling lustre.

Position 8. One act of mercy engageth God to another. Men argue thus, I have shewn you kindness already, therefore trouble me no more: but, because God hath shewn mercy, he is more ready still to shew mercy; his mercy in election makes him justify, adopt, glorify; one act of mercy engageth God to more. A parent's love to his child, makes him always giving.

Position 9. All the mercy in the creature is derived from God, and is but a drop of this ocean: the mercy and pity a mother hath to her child is from God; he that puts the milk in her breast, puts the compassion in her heart: therefore God is called 'The Father of mercies,' 2 Cor. i. 3. because he begets all the mercies in the world. If God hath put any kindness

into the creature, how much kindness is in him who is the Father of mercy ?

Position 10. God's mercy, as it makes the saints happy, so it should make them humble. Mercy is not the fruit of our goodness : but the fruits of God's goodness. Mercy is an alms that God bestows ; they have no cause to be proud, that live upon the alms of God's mercy, Job x. 15. ' If I be righteous, yet will I not lift up my head : ' all my righteousness is the effect of God's mercy, therefore I will be humble, and will not lift up my head.

Position 11. It is mercy stays the speedy execution of God's justice. Sinners continually provoke God, and make ' the fury come up in his face,' Ezek. xxxviii. 18. Whence is it God doth not presently arrest and condemn them ? It is not that God cannot do it, for he is armed with omnipotence, but it is from God's mercy ; mercy gets a reprieve for the sinner, and stops the speedy process of justice. God would, by his goodness, lead sinners to repentance.

Position 12. It is dreadful to have mercy witness against one : how sad was it with Haman, when the queen herself accused him ? Esth. vii. 6. So, when this queen of mercy shall stand up against a person and accuse him, it is only mercy that saves a sinner. Now, how sad to have mercy become an enemy ? if mercy be an accuser, who shall be our advocate ? The sinner never escapes hell, when mercy draws up the indictment.

I might shew you several species or kinds of mercy ; preventing mercy, sparing mercy, supplying mercy, guiding mercy, accepting mercy, healing mercy, quickening mercy, supporting mercy, forgiving mercy, correcting mercy, comforting mercy, delivering mercy, crowning mercy : but I shall speak of the qualifications or properties of God's mercy.

1. God's mercy is free. To set up merit is to destroy mercy : nothing can deserve mercy, because we are polluted in our blood ; nor force it ; we may force God to punish us, not to love us, Hos. xiv. 4. ' I will love them freely.' Every link in the chain of salvation, is wrought and interwoven with free grace. Election is free, Eph. i. 4. ' He hath chosen us in him, according to the good pleasure of his will.' Justification is free, Rom. iii. 24. ' Being justified freely by his grace.' Salvation is free, Titus iii. 5. ' According to his mercy he saved us.' Say not then, I am unworthy ; for mercy is free : if God should shew mercy only to such as are worthy, he would shew none at all.

2. God's mercy is an overflowing mercy ; it is infinite, Pl. lxxxvi. 5. ' Plenteous in mercy,' Eph. ii. 4. ' Rich in mercy,' Psal. li. 1. ' Multitude of mercies.' The vial of wrath doth but drop, but the fountain of mercy runs. The sun is not so full of light, as God is of mercy : God hath morning mercies, Lam.

ii. 24. 'His mercies are new every morning;' and night mercies, Psalm xlii. 8. 'In the night his song shall be with me.' God hath mercies under heaven, those we taste of; and in heaven, those we hope for.

3. God's mercy is eternal, Psalm ciii. 17. 'The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.' It is repeated twenty-six times in one Psalm, 'His mercy endureth for ever:' Psalm cxxxvi. The souls of the blessed shall be ever bathing themselves in this sweet and pleasant ocean of God's mercy. God's anger to his children lasts but a while, Psalm ciii. 9. 'But his mercy lasts for ever.' As long as he is God he will be shewing mercy; as his mercy is overflowing, so ever flowing.

Use 1. Of Information. It shews us how we are to look upon God in prayer, not in his judge's robes, but clothed with a rainbow, full of mercy and clemency; add wings to prayer, When Jesus Christ ascended up to heaven, that which made him go up thither with joy was, 'I go to my Father;' so that which should make our hearts ascend with joy in prayer, is, 'We are going to the Father of mercy, who sits upon the throne of grace;' go with confidence in this mercy; as when one goes to a fire, it is not doubtingly, perhaps it will warm ye, perhaps not.

Use 2. Believe in his mercy, Psalm lii. 8. 'I will trust in the mercy of God for ever.' God's mercy is a fountain opened, let down the bucket of faith, and you may drink of this fountain of salvation. What greater encouragement to believe than God's mercy? God counts it his glory to be scattering pardons; he is desirous that sinners should touch the golden sceptre of his mercy and live. And this willingness to shew mercy appears two ways:

1. By his entreating of sinners to come and lay hold on his mercy, Rev. xxii. 17. 'Whosoever will, come, and take the water of life freely.' Mercy woos sinners, it even kneels down to them. It were strange for a prince to intreat a condemned man to accept a pardon. God saith, Poor sinner, suffer me to ove thee, be willing to let me save thee.

2. By his joyfulness when sinners do lay hold on his mercy. What is God the better whether we receive his mercy, or not? What is the fountain profited, that others drink of it? Yet, such is God's goodness, that he rejoiceth at the salvation of sinners, and is glad, when his mercy is accepted of. When the prodigal son came home, how glad was the father? and he makes a feast, to express his joy: this was but a type or emblem, to shew how God rejoiceth when a poor sinner comes in, and lays hold of his mercy. What an encouragement is here to believe in God? He is a God of pardons, Neh. ix. 17. Mercy pleaseth him, Mic. vii. 18. Nothing doth prejudice us but unbelief. Unbelief stops the current of God's mercy from

running; it shuts up God's bowels, closeth the orifice of Christ's wounds, that no healing virtue will come out, Mat. xiii. 58. 'He could do no mighty works there, because of their unbelief.' Why dost thou not believe in God's mercy? Is it thy sins discourage? God's mercy can pardon great sins, nay, because they are great, Psal. xxv. 11. The sea covers great rocks as well as lesser sands; some that had an hand in crucifying Christ, found mercy. As far as the heavens are above the earth, so far is God's mercy above our sins, Isa. lv. 9. What will tempt us to believe, if not the mercy of God.

Use 3. Of caution. Take heed of abusing this mercy of God. Suck not poison out of the sweet flower of God's mercy: do not think, that because God is merciful, you may go on in sin; this is to make mercy become your enemy. None might touch the ark but the priests, who by their office were more holy: none may touch this ark of God's mercy, but such as are resolved to be holy. To sin because mercy abounds, is the devil's logic. He that sins because of mercy, is like one that wounds his head, because he hath a plaister: he that sins because of God's mercy, shall have judgment without mercy. Mercy abused turns to fury, Deut. xxix. 19, 20. 'If he bless himself, saying, I shall have peace though I walk after the imaginations of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst, the Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy, shall smoke against that man.' Nothing sweeter than mercy, when it is improved; nothing fiercer, when it is abused; nothing colder than lead, when it is taken out of the mine: nothing more scalding than lead, when it is heated. Nothing blunter than iron, nothing sharper, when it is whetted, Psal. ciii. 17. 'The mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him.' Mercy is not for them that sin and fear not, but for them that fear and sin not. God's mercy is an holy mercy; where it pardons, it heals.

Q. What shall we do to be interested in God's mercy?

Ans. 1. Be sensible of your wants. See how you stand in need of mercy, pardoning, saving mercy. See yourself orphans; Hof. xiv. 3. 'In thee the fatherless findeth mercy.' God bestows the alms of mercy only on such as are indigent. Be emptied of all opinion of self-worthiness. God pours the golden oil of mercy into empty vessels.

2. Go to God for mercy, Psal. li. i. 'Have mercy upon me, O God!' Put me not off with common mercy that reprobates may have; give me not only alcorns, but pearls; give me not only mercy to feed and clothe me, but mercy to save me; give me the cream of thy mercies: Lord! let me have mercy and loving-kindness, Psal. ciii. 4. 'Who crowned thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies. Give me such mercy as speaks thy electing love to my soul. O pray for mercy! God hath

treasures of mercy ; prayer is the key that opens these treasures ; and in prayer, be sure to carry Christ in your arms ; all the mercy comes through Christ ; 1 Sam. vii. 9. Samuel took a sucking lamb ; carry the Lamb Christ in your arms, go in his name, present his merits : say, Lord ! here is Christ's blood, which is the price of my pardon : Lord, shew me mercy, because Christ hath purchased it. Though God may refuse us when we come for mercy in our own name, yet not when we come in Christ's name : plead Christ's satisfaction, and this is such an argument as God cannot deny.

Use 4. It exhorts such as have found mercy, to three things : 1. To be upon *Gerizzim*, the mount of blessing and praising : They have not only heard the King of heaven is merciful, but they have found it so : the honey-comb of God's mercy hath dropt upon them ; when in wants, mercy supplied them ; when they were nigh unto death, mercy raised them from the sick-bed ; when covered with guilt, mercy pardoned them, Psal. ciii. 1. ' Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.' O how should the vessels of mercy run over with praise ! 1 Tim. i. 13. ' Who was before a persecutor, and injurious : but I obtained mercy.' I was hemiracled with mercy ; as the sea overflows and breaks down the banks, so the mercy of God did break down the banks of my sin, and mercy did sweetly flow into my soul. You that have been monuments of God's mercy, should be trumpets of praise ; you that have tasted the Lord is gracious, tell others what experiences you have had of God's mercy, that you may encourage them to seek to him for mercy, Psal. lxvi. 16. ' I will tell you what God hath done for my soul ;' when I found my heart dead, God's Spirit did come upon me mightily, and the blowing of that wind made the withering flowers of my grace revive. O tell others of God's goodness, that you may set others a blessing him, and that you may make God's praises live when you are dead.

2. To love God. Mercy should be the attractive of love ; Psal. xviii. 1. ' I will love thee, O Lord, my strength.' The Hebrew word for love, signifies love out of the inward bowels. God's justice may make us fear him, his mercy may make us love him. If mercy will not produce love, what will ? We are to love God for giving us our food, much more for giving us grace ; for sparing mercy, much more for saving mercy. Sure that heart is made of marble, which the mercy of God will not dissolve in love. " I would hate my own soul, (saith St. Augustine) if I did not find it loving God."

3. To imitate God in shewing mercy. God is the Father of mercy ; shew yourselves to be his children, by being like him. St. Ambrose saith, The sum and definition of religion is, Be rich in works of mercy, be helpful to the bodies and souls of

others. Scatter your golden seeds; let the lamp of your profession be filled with the oil of charity. Be merciful in giving and forgiving. 'Be ye merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful.'

OF THE TRUTH OF GOD.

THE next attribute is God's truth; Deut. xxxii. 4. 'A God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he,' Pſal. lvii. 10. 'For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds.' A God of truth, Pſal. lxxxvi. 15.—'Plenteous in truth.' God is the truth. He is true, 1. In a physical ſenſe; true in his being: he hath a real ſubſiſtence, and gives a being to others. 2. He is true in a moral ſenſe; he is true *ſine errore*, without errors; *et ſine fallacia*, without deceit. God is *Prima veritas*, the pattern and prototype of truth. There is nothing true but what is in God, or comes from God. I ſhall now ſpeak of God's truth, as it is taken from his veracity in making good his promiſes, 1 Kings viii. 56. 'There hath not failed one word of all his good promiſe:' the promiſe is God's bond, God's truth is the ſeal ſet to his bond. This is the thing to be explicated and diſcuſſed, God's truth in fulfilling his promiſes.

There are two things to be obſerved in the promiſes of God to comfort us: 1. The power of God, whereby he is able to fulfil the promiſe. God hath promiſed to ſubdue our corruption, Mic. vii. 19. 'He will ſubdue our iniquities.' O! faith a believer, my corruption is ſo ſtrong, that ſure I ſhall never get the maſtery of it: Thus Abraham looked at God's power, Rom. iv. 21. 'Being fully perſuaded that what God had promiſed he was able to perform.' He believed, that that God, who could make a world, could make dry breaſts give ſuck. This is faith's ſupport, there is nothing too hard for God. He that could bring water out of a rock, is able to bring to paſs his promiſes.

2. The truth of God in the promiſes: God's truth is the ſeal ſet to the promiſe, Tit. i. 2. 'In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promiſed.' *Eternal life*, there is the ſweetneſs of the promiſe: *God which cannot lie*, there is the certainty of it. *Mercy* makes the promiſe, *truth* fulfils it. God's providences are uncertain, but his promiſes are the 'ſure mercies of David,' Acts xiii. 24. 'God is not a man that he ſhould repent,' 1 Sam. xv. 29. The word of a prince cannot always be taken, but God's promiſe is inviolable. God's truth is one of the richeſt jewels of his crown, and he hath pawned this jewel in a promiſe, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. 'Altho' my houſe be