

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 politically, 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:

if the sun had been set lower, it would have burnt us; if higher, it would not have warmed us with its beams. God's wisdom is seen in appointing the seasons of the year, Psal. lxxiv. 17. 'Thou hast made summer and winter.' If it had been all summer, the heat would have scorched us, if all winter, the cold would have killed us. The wisdom of God is seen in chequering the dark and the light: if it had been all night, there had been no labour, if all day, there had been no rest. Wisdom is seen in mixing the elements, the earth with the sea: if it had been all sea, then we had wanted bread; if it had been all earth, then we had wanted water. The wisdom of God is seen in preparing and ripening the fruits of the earth, the wind and frosts prepare the fruits, the sun and rain ripen the fruits. God's wisdom is seen in setting bounds to the sea, and so wisely contriving it, that though the sea be higher than the earth, yet it should not overflow the earth; so that we may cry out with the Psalmist, Psal. civ. 24. 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.' There is nothing to be seen but miracles of wisdom. God's wisdom is seen in ordering things in the body politic, that one shall have need of another: the poor need the rich man's money, and the rich need the poor man's labour. God makes one trade depend upon another, that one may be helpful to another, and that mutual love may be preserved.

(2.) The second work wherein God's wisdom shines forth, is the work of redemption: 1. Here was the master-piece of divine wisdom, to contrive a way to happiness, between the sin of man, and the justice of God. We may cry out with the apostle, Rom. xi. 33. 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.' This posed men and angels. If God had put us to find out a way of salvation when we were lost, we could neither have had an head to devise, nor a heart to desire, what God's infinite wisdom had found out for us. Mercy had a mind to save sinners, yet loth that the justice of God should be wronged: It is a pity, saith mercy, that such a noble creature as man should be made to be undone; and yet no reason that God's justice should be a loser. What way then shall be found out? Angels cannot satisfy for the wrong done to God's justice, nor is it fit that one nature should sin, and another nature suffer: what then? Shall man be for ever lost? Now, while mercy was thus debating with itself, what to do for the recovery of fallen man, here the wisdom of God stepped in; and thus the oracle spake, Let God become man; let the second person in the Trinity be incarnate, and suffer; and so for fitness he shall be man; and for ability he shall be God: thus justice may be satisfied, and man saved. O the depth of the riches of the wisdom of God, thus to make justice and mercy to kiss each other!

great is this mystery, 'God manifested in the flesh,' 1 Tim. iii. 6. What wisdom was this, that Christ should be made sin, yet knew no sin; that God should condemn the sin, yet save the sinner? Here was wisdom, to find out the way of salvation. 2. The means by which salvation is applied set forth God's wisdom, that salvation should be by faith, not by works. Faith is an humble grace, it gives all to Christ; it is an adorer of free grace: and free grace being advanced here, God hath his glory: and it is his highest wisdom to exalt his own glory. 3. The way of working faith declares God's wisdom; it is wrought by the word preached, Rom. x. 17. 'Faith comes by hearing.' What is the weak breath of a man to convert a soul? It is like whispering in the ears of a dead man; this is foolishness in the eye of the world: but the Lord loves to shew his wisdom, by that which seems folly, 1 Cor. i. 27. 'He hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.' Why so? ver. 29. 'That no flesh should glory in his presence.' Should God convert by the ministry of angels, then we should have been ready to have gloried in angels, and have given that honour to them which is due to God; but when God works by weak tools, makes use of men who are of like passions with ourselves, and by them converts; now the power is plainly seen to be of God, 2 Cor. iv. 7. 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.' Herein is God's wisdom seen, that no flesh may glory in his presence.

(3.) The wisdom of God wonderfully appears in the works of his providence. Every providence hath either a mercy or a wonder wrapt up in it. The wisdom of God, in his works of providence, appears, 1. By effecting great things by small, contemptible means. He cured the stung Israelites, by a brazen serpent. If some sovereign antidote had been used, if the balm of Gilead had been brought, there had been some likelihood that this should have healed; but what was there in a brazen serpent? It was a mere image, and not applied to him that was wounded, only he was to look upon it, yet this wrought a cure. The less probability in the instrument, the more is God's wisdom seen. 2. The wisdom of God is seen in doing his work by that which to the eye of flesh seems quite contrary: God intended to advance Joseph, and make all his brethren's sheaves bow to his sheaf: now what way doth he take? first Joseph is thrown into the pit, then sold into Egypt; then after that put in prison, Gen. xxxix. 20. And by his imprisonment, God made way for his advancement. For God to save in an ordinary way, wisdom would not be so much taken notice of. But then he goes strangely to work, and saves in that very way in which we think he will destroy; now, his wisdom shines forth in a

most glorious conspicuous manner. God would make Israel victorious, and what way doth he go in? He lessens Gideon's army, Judg. vii. 2. 'The people that are with thee are too many:' he reduceth the army of two and thirty thousand to three hundred; and by taking away the means of victory, makes Israel victorious. God had a design to bring his people out of Egypt, and a strange course he takes to effect it: he stirred up the hearts of the Egyptians to hate them, Psal. cv. 25. 'He turned their heart to hate his people.' The more they hated and oppressed Israel, the more God plagued the Egyptians, and the more glad they were to let Israel go, Exod. xii. 33. The Egyptians were urgent upon Israel, that they might send them out of the land in haste. God had a mind to save Jonah when he was cast into the sea, and he lets the fish swallow him up, and so bring him to the shore. God would save Paul, and all that were in the ship with him, and there was no way to save them, but the ship must break, and they all came safe to land upon the broken pieces of the ship, Acts xxvii. 44. In reference to the church, God oft goes by contrary means, makes the enemy do his work; he can strike a straight stroke by crooked sticks. God hath oft made his church grow and flourish by persecution. "The showers of blood have made her more fruitful," Julian. Exod. i. 10. 'Come let us deal wisely with them lest they multiply;' and that way they took to suppress them, made them multiply, ver. 12. 'The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied:' like ground, the more it is harrowed, it bears the better crop. The apostles were scattered by reason of persecution, and their scattering was like the scattering of seed; they went up and down, and preached the gospel, and brought daily converts. Paul was put in prison, and his bonds were a means to enlarge the gospel, Phil. i. 12.

2. The wisdom of God is seen in making the most desperate evils turn to the good of his children. As several poisonous ingredients, wisely tempered by the skill of the artist, make a sovereign medicine, so God makes the most deadly afflictions, cooperate for the good of his children. He purifies them, and prepares them for heaven, 2 Cor. iv. 17. These hard frosts harden the spring flowers of glory. The wise God, by a divine chymistry, turns afflictions into cordials. God makes his people gainers by losses, and turns their crosses into blessings.

4. The wisdom of God is seen in this, that the sins of men shall carry on God's work; yet that he should have no hand in their sin. The Lord permits sin, but doth not approve it. He hath an hand in the action in which sin is, but not in the sin of the action. As in the crucifying of Christ, so far as it was a natural action, God did concur: if he had not given the Jews life

and breath, they could not have done it : but, as it was a sinful action, so God abhorred it. A musician plays upon a viol out of tune ; the musician is the cause of the sound, but the jarring and discord is from the viol itself : so men's natural motion is from God, but their sinful motion is from themselves. A man that rides on a lame horse, his riding is the cause why the horse goes, but the lameness is from the horse itself. Herein is God's wisdom, the sins of men shall carry on his work, yet he hath no hand in them.

5. The wisdom of God is seen in helping in desperate cases. God loves to shew his wisdom when human help and wisdom fail. Exquisite lawyers love to wrestle with niceties and difficulties in the law, to shew their skill the more. God's wisdom is never at a loss ; but when providences are darkest, now appears the morning-star of deliverance, Psalm cxxxvi. 23. ' Who remembered us in our low condition.' Sometimes God melts away the spirits of his enemies, Josh. ii. 24. Sometimes he finds them other work to do, and finds a retreat to them, as he did to Saul when he was pursuing David ; ' The Philistines are in the land.' ' In the Mount will God be seen.' When the church seems to be upon the altar, her place and liberty ready to be sacrificed, now comes the angel.

6. God's wisdom is seen in befooling wise men, and making their wisdom a means of their overthrow. Ahithophel had deep policy, 2 Sam. xvi. 23. ' The counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God : ' but he consulted his own shame. ' The Lord turned his counsel into foolishness,' 2 Sam. xvii. 23. Job v. 13. ' God taketh the wise in their own craftiness ; ' that is, when they think to deal wisely, he not only disappoints them, but insnares them. The snares they lay for others catch themselves, Ps. ix. 16. ' In the net which they hid, is their own foot taken.' God loves to counterplot politicians ; he makes use of their own wit to undo them, and hangs Haman upon his own gallows.

Use 1. Adore the wisdom of God ; it is an infinite deep the angels cannot search into, Rom. xi. 32. ' His ways are past finding out.' And as we should adore, so we should rest in the wisdom of God : God sees what condition is best for us. Did we believe the wisdom of God, it would keep us from murmuring. Rest in God's wisdom in several cases : 1. In want of spiritual comfort : God is wise, he sees it good sometimes we should be without comfort. Perhaps we should be lifted up with spiritual enlargements, as Paul with his revelations, 2 Cor. xii. 7. It is hard to have the heart low, when comfort is high. God sees humility is better for us than joy. It is better to want comfort, and be humble, than to have it, and be proud. 2. In want of bodily strength, rest in God's wisdom ; he sees what is

best. Perhaps the less health the more grace; weaker in body, the stronger we are in faith, 2 Cor. iv. 16. 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' At Rome there were two laurel trees: when the one withered, the other flourished. The inward man is renewed. When God shakes the tree of the body, he is now gathering the fruits of righteousness, Heb. xii. 11. Sickneſs is God's lance to let out the imposthume of sin, Isa. xxvii. 9. 3. In case of God's providences to his church: we wonder what God is doing with us, and are ready to kill ourselves with care: rest in God's wisdom; he knows best what he hath to do, Psal. lxxvii. 19. 'His footsteps are not known.' Trust him where you cannot trace him. God is most in his way, when we think he is most out of the way; when we think God's church is, as it were, in the grave, and there is a tomb-stone laid upon her, God's wisdom can roll away the stone from the sepulchre. 'Christ cometh leaping over mountains,' Cant. ii. 8. Either his power can remove the mountain, or his wisdom knows how to leap over it. 4. In case we are low in the world, or have but little oil in our cruse; rest in God's wisdom, he sees it best; it is to cure pride and wantonness. God knew, if thy estate had not been lost, thy soul had been lost. God, he saw riches would be a snare unto thee, 1 Tim. vi. 9. Art thou troubled that God hath prevented a snare? God will make thee rich in faith; what thou lackest in temporals shall be made up in spirituals: God will give thee more of his love. Thou art weak in estate, yet God will make thee strong in assurance. O rest in God's wisdom! he will carve the best piece for thee. 5. In case of the loss of dear friends, a wife, or child, or husband; rest satisfied in God's wisdom. God hath taken away these, because he would have more of your love: he breaks these crutches, that we may live more upon him by faith. God would have us learn to go without crutches.

Use 2. If God be infinitely wise, then let us go to him for wisdom; as Solomon, 1 Kings iii. 9. 'Give thy servant an understanding heart; and the speech pleased the Lord.' And there is encouragement for us, 'If any one lack wisdom let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not.' James i. 5. Wisdom is in God, *tanquam in fonte*, as in the fountain; his wisdom is imparted, not impaired; his stock is not spent by giving. Go then to God: Lord, do thou light my lamp; in thy light shall I see light; give me wisdom, to know the fallacy of my heart, the subtilties of the old serpent; to walk jealously towards myself, religiously towards thee, prudently towards others: guide me by thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.