

## THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Simonides, a heathen poet, being asked by Hiero, king of Syracuse, "What is God?" desired a day to think upon it; and when that day was at an end, he desired two days; and when these were past, he desired four days. Thus he continued to double the number of days in which he desired to think of God ere he would give an answer, upon which, the king expressing his surprise at his behavior asked what he meant by this? The poet answered, "The more I think of God, He is the more dark and unknown to me!" Indeed, no wonder that he made such an answer for the true God is not only past finding out in His ways, but in His Person and Perfections as well.

Man by nature, is religious, and worships them who by nature are no gods (Gal 4:8). He worships that which is the image of his own imagination, which image is created out of self love and in the long-run, is nothing more than the worship of self or demons. His worship is controlled by a darkened understanding, a perverse will, and a heart of enmity against that which is Truth. He does not know the true God and cannot find Him out by wisdom. A knowledge of the true God comes from a searching into the word of God (the Scriptures) under the illumination of the Spirit of God. In the Scriptures we find that the God of the Bible is *by nature* God, and is the only fit object of worship and adoration. This fitness of nature we call the attributes of perfections of God. By His attributes, we mean those necessary characteristics of His nature which make Him God. Although God is above the comprehension of all men, and certainly cannot be known by a sin-darkened mind, yet there are many things which He has seen fit to reveal that can be apprehended by man. It is man's duty to search after this God that he might know Him in His true character. A knowledge of God is absolutely necessary to one's salvation, for an unknown God can neither be worshipped nor loved. It is the purpose of your writer to bring before you several of these perfections with the desire that you carefully study to see if this be the God whom you worship. If you are a member of the family of heaven you will find that you love this God of the Bible, but if you are yet in your sins you will find enmity in your heart against Him.

## 1. GOD IS A PERFECT SPIRIT

Christ said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24)

This means that God is not a body, and does not possess a body. There cannot be perfection to a body, but limitation, which admits imperfection. The Bible reveals that God is omnipresent and independent. If He had a body as does man He could be neither. A body would limit Him to one place at a time which would rule out His inherent perfection. Also, a body would destroy the independence of God. A body is dependent upon its several members, and being a compound, this rules out any notion of independence. But did not Christ have a body, and is He not God? Yes, He had a body and as a man He was limited. He did not cease to be God, although He had taken upon Himself a human nature and as God He was perfect Spirit with full omnipresence and independence.

Does not the Bible ascribe bodily parts to God? Yes, but these are ascribed to Him only figuratively, and for the purpose of illustrating His perfection to us. The Scriptures often use language in a manner to accommodate our finite minds. God is said to have a “face” (Ps 27:8) to illustrate His presence; He is said to have “eyes” (Prov. 15:3) to illustrate His omniscience; i.e., that everything is known to Him and beheld by Him. He is said to have “ears” (Is 59:1) to show His ability and readiness to hear His people when they call unto Him; He is spoken of as having a “nose” to show that He accepts His people in Christ as a sweet smelling savor, or His rejection of people as something that stinks in His presence; a “mouth” is ascribed to Him (Is 1:20) to illustrate His commands and promises; His “arms” are for the purpose of showing His power and strength. Therefore our God in illustrating His perfections in this manner shows Himself able to meet every need of His people and to have full sufficiency in all things.

If God is free from a compound body then we must rule out images of Him. Not only does it go contrary to the Word of God to make images of God, but it shows the misconception men have of God. They think Him to be one as themselves. He is to most just an “old gray-haired man” with love to all. This is not the God of the Bible, but the god of man’s imagination. It is idolatry to have any representation on earth of things in heaven. We are not to have pictures of God, Christ, angels, the heavenly city, etc. “And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, BUT SAW NO SIMILITUDE; only ye heard a voice. And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even the ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it. Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye SAW NO MANNER OF SIMILITUDE on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: *lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is upon the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of anything that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth; lest thou lift up thine eyes to heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest*

be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.” (Deut. 4:12-19). “Thou shalt have none other gods before me. *Thou shalt not make thee any graven image*, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.” (Deut 5:7-10).

The only pictures that Christ left of Himself are the Word of God and the Lord’s Supper. As we read the Scriptures we receive a full picture of God in His perfections and as we come to the Lord’s table in communion we have a picture of Christ in all His sufferings. We must not have crucifixes, man-made paintings, images of Christ, Mary, the apostles or angels. These externals are of no value in our worship of God. To pray before a painting, or an image is idolatry and is not worship of the God of the Bible! God is Spirit and we must worship Him in spirit and in truth. We worship Him spiritually, out of a spiritual nature; in the truth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and in opposition to types and shadows. This is the true worship of God, and is that which He receives.

God is Spirit! Again, this means that He not only is without a body, but that *He is invisible and immortal*. “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Tim. 1:17). “Which in his times he will shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen” ( 1 Tim. 6:15-16). Again, we see that God has been seen by no man. When Jesus Christ was upon the earth in the days of His flesh men did not see His divine nature, His Godhead, except as He illustrated it in His works and words. They saw only His human body, which veiled His deity. Eyes cannot behold spirit except through the activities of that spirit. God being Spirit is invisible and immortal. Bodily substance can perish, but not spirit. Also, these verses tell us that God is eternal. Matter is not eternal. It was created by God and had a beginning. Body is matter, therefore God who is eternal is not body. Oh Divine mystery! Oh, marvelous thought that such a perfect One would condescend to have fellowship with man, and provide for him life eternal!

I must close my observations under this perfection of God by stating we see in what way man was made in the image of God in his original creation, and what that image is that is renewed in regeneration. It is not our bodily substance that was made in the likeness of God, but that we were made spiritual beings. As man left the hands of his Creator he was holy as well as spiritual. In his fall into sin he lost this likeness. In regeneration it is this likeness of holiness and spirituality that is restored. “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, WHICH AFTER GOD IS CREATED IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND TRUE HOLINESS.” (Eph. 4:23-24).

## 2. GOD IS INFINITE

The infinity of God means that He is unbounded and unlimited, immeasurable, unsearchable, and not to be comprehended. This statement of definition is of the utmost importance, and I urge you to give attention to it. Herein is declared that God is eternal and cannot be bound down to time; that He is omnipresent, and cannot be limited to space; that He is unsearchable, immeasurable, and cannot be found out by man's wisdom or science, but must be revealed according to His own will, and that He is not to be comprehended, i.e. He can only be fully understood and known when He sees fit to reveal Himself to His creatures. There is much of God that we can apprehend, but it is impossible to comprehend Him in His fullness. "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" (Job 11:7). "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:33-34).

*God is infinite in respect to His being.* Man's science cannot arrive at the proper conclusions concerning His being and person. Who of their own wisdom will conclude that there is one God? Who of his own knowledge found out that this one God is Three, consisting of three Persons— Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Who can tell me of all His perfections and claim that they searched these out by themselves? The answer— NONE! God is only known by revelation. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, in His incarnation tells forth the Being of God. From Him we have the Scriptures which give a further revelation of the Being of God. God must make Himself known for He is far above the wisdom of man.

*In respect of place, God is omnipresent,* and cannot be measured, or limited. It will help to understand that the presence of God can be divided by His *glorious presence*: which is in Heaven, and is spoken of as His throne. There is His *essential presence*: wherein He is everywhere at the same time. This does not mean that God is evenly distributed over the vast universe, but that all of God is everywhere present at the same time. Marvelous mystery! Then there is the *gracious presence* of God: which is with His people in salvation, worship, fellowship, etc. It is this presence that He promises where two or three are gathered together in His name (Matt. 18:20). It is this presence that we pray for Him to give, and not take away. This division will help us to understand much of what is written of our God in the Scriptures. But God's omnipresence shows His infinity, and the testimony of Scripture concerning this is evident: "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and my uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou dost scrutinize my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it. Where shall I go from thy spirit? or where shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (Psalm 139:1-10). "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build to me? and where is the place of my rest?" (Is. 66:1). "Am I a God at

hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.” (Jer. 23:23-24).

*In respect of time, God is eternal, and cannot be bound down to days, years, past, present, future. He always has been, and He always will be! He is without beginning or ending. He is the eternal “I Am.” He is spoken of as having eternal power (Rom. 1:20), eternal knowledge (Acts 15:18), and eternal mercy ( Psalm 103:17). To these we can add all His attributes and perfections, for these are essential to Him, and a part of His blessed nature. There has never been a time when He was without these perfections, and there will never be a time when He shall cease to be all that we shall try to bring before you in this study. Also, God has existed as a blessed Trinity, in the Persons of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. They are co-eternal and there has never been a time, nor will there ever be a time when the Father is without the Son and the Spirit, the Son without the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit without the Father and the Son. The Scriptures declare *the Father to be eternal*: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” (Psalm 90:2). *The Son is eternal*: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou art little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth to me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2). This passage is a prophecy of the birth and incarnation of Christ and where He was to be born. He who was to be born in time is said to be “from everlasting,” [Hebrew: the days of eternity] that is, eternal with the Father. The Spirit is eternal: “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14).*

In view of the fact that God is infinite, and being infinite, He is eternal, everywhere present at the same time, and knows all things at once, we should be encouraged at the thought of redemption being in His hands, and of His purpose. There is no possibility of a miscarriage in salvation if it is of the Lord. He has the power to redeem; He is present everywhere, therefore can search out His own and apply redemption; being eternal in power He can make it effectual in the lives of the redeemed.

On the other hand, a knowledge of this should strike terror in the hearts of ungodly sinners who despise this God of the Bible. He knows your whereabouts, your frame of mind, and there is not one thought, deed, or desire hidden from Him. He states that every sin will receive its recompense of reward. He has the wisdom, the power, and eternity to carry out His threats against you that know Him not in redemption through Christ the Lord.

What an incentive it should be to fly to Him from wrath through the mercy that is in Christ Jesus, to know that such a perfect, spiritual, infinite, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent One as this has regarded man in His purpose, and in justice and mercy has provided the suitable sacrifice to take away the wrath of the law, and to pardon sins. You must not come to God apart from Christ, or you will find Him a devouring fire. If you would find mercy and forgiveness of sins you must come pleading Christ’s merits and blood between you and your

sins, between God's wrath and anger, [His righteous indignation against sin, *all* sin] and for acceptance only in Him!

### 3. THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

The attributes of God divide themselves into what are termed *communicable*, which means perfections that belong to Him that are seen in some degree in man as well; some of these are love, hatred, mercy, justice and knowledge, and *incommunicable* which has reference to those perfections that belong to Him alone, and cannot be ascribed to man. Immutability is an incommunicable attribute, and cannot be found in man, or any other creature. This [immutability] means that God is unchangeable and is not subject to, nor ever will be subject to change. This is a steadfast anchor for the believer in this uncertain time when events are changing with such rapidity that it makes one's head swim! Oh, the joy to know that He who is in control of all events is the unchangeable One! Oh, to have faith in the fact that all is working according to His eternal purpose, for His glory, and for the good of the Elect! Only the God who is unchangeable is worthy of our trust in times like these, and only to the God of the Bible is ascribed this perfection, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." (Malachi 3:6). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

First, we will note wherein God is immutable. He is unchangeable in His nature, in His perfections, in His love, in His purpose, and in His covenant.

God is immutable in His *nature*. "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." (Psalm 102:27). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8). If God were not always the same in His nature He would cease to be God. If He were to change it would have to be for the better or for the worse. It could not be for better for He is perfect in every way now, therefore it would be for the worse; and for Him to become worse would be an imperfection which would not allow Him to be God. That our God can never change for the better, for *there is no imperfection in Him* that would admit of betterment, and that He cannot change for the worse because He is immutable in this state of absolute holiness ought to bring forth praise from the heart of every believer!

God is immutable in His *perfections*. All of His attributes are essential to His nature and therefore cannot be changeable. He could never change in His perfection of power. He now has all power and authority which He cannot lose or increase. His power is the same from eternity past to eternity future. He can never change in His knowledge. He is unchangeable in His faithfulness. every promise that He has made will be accomplished. Every threat that has been given will be brought to pass. If He has placed His promises and threats upon conditions we can be sure that these will be certain as to the conditions being met or failed in. We could take every attribute (which is not necessary to the purpose of this study) and illustrate them to be immutable. If God is immutable then it is necessary that His perfections be also.

God is immutable in His *purpose*. "The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations." (Psalm 33:11). "The eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians. 3:11). The purpose of God has interest in everything that comes to pass, and in a special covenant way with the things of salvation. This is His secret

will that is known only as His predestinated plan is worked out in providence, and is brought to light through the Word of God. What He has purposed before the foundation of the world will be brought to pass with accuracy, and in His appointed time. He does not make plans and change them because of unforeseen events. He has a perfect knowledge of all events, and all circumstances are in His perfect control. I grant that those things which are in God's secret will cannot be comprehended by man, and there are many things that we are unable to see His hand directly in, but this does not mean that He is not in control. These dark things (dark to us because beyond our understanding) belong to Him and in glory we will see the purpose of them. The things that are revealed belong unto us, therefore let us obey herein, and trust all else to His wisdom.

God is immutable in His *love*. This the Arminian world cannot take. Their problem is that they have a "god" that is enslaved to their own wills, and cannot do anything with perfection from eternity. But to the child of God it is no problem to see that if God loves it is an act of His sovereign will, and that He chooses the objects of this love. Understand, God's love is not emotional, nor governed by the nature of the creature. He set His love upon us when we were unlovely. Also, God does not hate His elect up to a point in their experience, and then changes that hatred into love, but His love determines who it is that will be the objects of His redemption. His love grows out of His election, and is just as eternal. You say, "But are not the elect 'children of wrath, even as others?' " Yes, this is what the Scriptures declare. The problem is solved when we remember that God views all men as what they are *by nature*— therefore, even the elect are spoken of as the children wrath— and what they are by His eternal decree— therefore they are already loved, redeemed, called, justified, and glorified. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah to me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more overflow the earth; so have I sworn that I will not be angry with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee." (Isaiah 54:7-10). As a word of caution let me say, to you that do not know Christ as Redeemer, to you that have not embraced Him by faith, to you that have not fled to Him from the wrath to come, you can take no pleasure in the thoughts of God's eternal, unchangeable, love! You cannot know that you are in this love until you are brought to an end of your sins and know Christ to be your Savior! The objects of His love are in His secret counsels until they are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. All whom He loves, to them He reveals Christ to their hearts. All who are the objects of His love are brought to the realization of His purpose, i.e. holiness and conformity to the image of Christ. You can only conclude that you are a child of wrath as long as you appear to be such in your experience. Flee to Christ and then, not before, I will declare that you are an object of His love!

God is immutable in His *covenant* of mercy and redemption. This covenant is the eternal agreement of the Godhead in the redemption of a people who were elected by the Father, given to Christ, for whom He was to be Mediator, Surety, and Substitute, by which their sins were to be laid upon Him, and a full payment for them made into the hands of justice. This covenant guaranteed that those for whom Christ died would be given eternal life by the

Holy Spirit, and brought into the full enjoyment of the benefits of salvation. These benefits are called the “sure mercies of David.” Christ Himself is given to the elect, for a covenant, with the promise that He would not fail but would fully accomplish salvation for those given to Him. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. *He shall not fail nor be discouraged,* till he hath set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law. I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and *give thee for a covenant of the people,* for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house. I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” (Isaiah 42:1,4,6-8). This covenant is not only eternal, but is immutable. It cannot be defeated, nor will God change that which He purposed therein. He has both wisdom and power to bring it to pass as it was determined before the foundation of the world. All that were elected are redeemed by Jesus Christ; all that were redeemed will be effectually called by the Holy Spirit. All the elected, redeemed, called-out ones, will persevere in grace and be brought to glorification. Christ “shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.” If we did not have this foundation to faith we would be most miserable. We could not be sure that Christ would have a people. We could not be sure that any who now have a hope in Christ would ever be brought to glory! But, praise His name, we can be sure! He has promised, and He will fulfill. He cannot deny Himself!

Second, there are some difficulties that must be viewed at this time in reference to the unchangeableness of God. These difficulties are in the form of objections that unbelievers have brought against the immutability of God.

*Objection one:* If God is unchangeable, what about creation? There was a time when there was no creation, and then God brought into existence the worlds, is this not change? This is no change in God, but in the outward existence of things. God has had all creative power from eternity, therefore there was no change in His power. He had eternally decreed to create, therefore there is no change in His purpose. And, besides, in speaking of the creation the Scriptures state that there was no change in God: “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. THEY shall perish, but THOU shalt endure: yea, all of them shall grow old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” (Psalm 102:25-27).

*Objection two:* If God is unchangeable, and Christ is God, what about His incarnation wherein He became man? This objection is removed when we remember that in His incarnation Christ had two natures: deity, which is eternal; humanity, which He assumed in time. In His incarnation He did not cease to be God, nor was there any change that took place in His deity. He was the same, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent God that He was before the incarnation. The change that took place in His birth, growing, dying, etc., was within His human nature, and not as He was God. Concerning the purpose of God in this; He was from of old pre-determined to become man as our Representative.

*Objection three:* What about the providence of God, and its constant change? In providential changes it is only God's outward dealings with men that undergo such a change, and not the nature or purpose of God. God has made certain conditional laws wherein there will be a change in the outward ministrations of His providence according to our obedience or disobedience. This does not change His eternal, secret purpose, which has ordained even these things, but the change is within the creature. "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him." (Job 23:13-14).

We could give other objections which have been raised against the immutability of God, such as, prayer. Scripture language that seems to speak of change in God, etc., but this is unnecessary since they can be answered as the above objections. Prayer never changes the purpose of God, but is an act of submission on the part of the believer wherein he is brought into harmony with the will and purpose of God. When God is said to repent it does not mean change in Him, but this is language to accommodate man. The change is in man wherein there appears to be a change in the treatment by God of man. The change is not in God but in outward providence. Though these are things above our understanding we can trust the His word, the Holy Scriptures to be true, and put full confidence in God that He is the same from eternity past, now, and throughout eternity future!

#### 4. THE POWER OF GOD

Another of God's attributes is power. By this is meant God's omnipotence; i.e., that He has all power and authority to enforce, and do, that which is according to His wisdom and purpose. Men, angels and devils cannot thwart His plan in that all power belongs to Him, and all things are under His authority. This power belongs to all Persons of the Godhead, and when we speak of God's power we have reference to the essential attribute of omnipotence as it belongs to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in unity. In Revelation 19, where we have a song of praise unto God for His righteous judgments, we read in verses 5 and 6, "And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God OMNIPOTENT reigneth." In Matt. 26, Christ is before Caiaphas the high priest, just before His crucifixion. In giving an answer concerning His Divine Sonship, speaks of God by the name of Power. In verse 4 we read, "Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of POWER, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

First, the power of God is illustrated by *creation*. Creation speaks two things concerning God. It tells of His deity first, and of His power second. Although the redemptive mercy of God cannot be found out through creation, yet it speaks enough of His character to render all without excuse in that men do not even recognize His sovereignty and Godhead from creation. "For the invisible things of him (the things of God which are not seen by human eye) from the creation of the world are clearly seen (i.e. the invisible things of God can be clearly seen from the visible creation of the world; and then we are told what these things are that are seen from the creation), being understood by the things that are made, even His ETERNAL POWER (His sovereignty) and Godhead (His deity); so that they are without excuse." (Rom. 1:20).

All are in agreement that the First Cause of creation is possessed with great power. Aristotle the pagan Greek philosopher saw this much. We who know this First Cause to be God see even greater power illustrated in that it is revealed to us in the Scripture that He created the World at once, and without weariness.

Second, the power of God is illustrated by His *providence*. By providence is meant God's government, and care of all His creation. It takes great power to keep the world together, to feed all His creatures, to plan and control all events in the lives of all His creatures. Yet God does this in His providence. He observes the falling of a sparrow and numbers the hairs of our heads. Job tells us that the control of all the elements is in His hand, and that He marks the bounds of the waters; "Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it. He compassed the waters with bounds, until the day and the night come to an end. The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof. He divideth the sea with his *power*, and by his understanding he smiteth the proud." (Job 26:6-12).

Third, God's power is illustrated in *Redemption*. We see the power of God at work in the incarnation of the Redeemer. Who but He could bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Who but He has the power to bring forth the Savior from the womb of a virgin? Who but God has the power to bring into union in one Person both man and God? In Luke 1:35-37 we read, "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the POWER of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God . . . For with God nothing shall be impossible." All the forces of Hell were raised to destroy the Savior before He effected redemption. It was the power of God that protected His humanity from infancy to the cross, through death, till the resurrection. Wherefore it is also said of Jesus Christ that He is, "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead {declared: Gr. determined}" (Ro 1:4). In what is this power principally concerned? That He would be "able (Gr. has the power) . . . to save them to the uttermost (forever) that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25).

It was the power of God that strengthened the humanity of Christ to fulfill the righteousness of the law in His perfect obedience; and enabled Him to remove the curse of the law by standing under that curse Himself, and paying into the hands of justice the uttermost farthing. Without this obedience of Jesus Christ there would be no righteousness for the elect. All would be under the curse of the law, and the wrath of God. No mere man could establish this righteousness, and remove the curse for *himself*, much the less have an obedience with infinite value to justify *multitudes!* It is only the dignity of His Person, and the power of God that has provided such righteousness for the ungodly!

Fourth, God's power is illustrated by *conversion*. This is seen, without doubt, when we realize that the sinner is dead in sins, unwilling to come to Christ, and is unable to repent and believe. Conversion is the power of God upon the dead sinner wherein he is quickened into life. This is the power of resurrection. There is more power exerted here than in the creation of the worlds. This is that power wherein the averse, dead, sinner, is made willing to come to Christ and part with sin. This is God's power!

Fifth, the power of God is illustrated by the use of the *Gospel* as a means in the salvation of His people. The preaching of the Gospel is foolish to the ungodly and worldly wise. They see no value in its declaration. But to the saved, it is the power of God, and is employed by the Holy Spirit as the efficient cause and instrument in the salvation of sinners. Hear the Scriptures witness to this: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:16). "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but to us who are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For when in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock,

and to the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:18-24). “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. {hath: Gr. is he who hath} But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not from us. But to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (2 Cor. 4:5-7). “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election by God. {beloved...: or, beloved of God, your election} For our gospel came not to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” (1 Thess. 1:4-5). We know that this power of salvation is not resident in the Gospel but as it is made effectual by the Holy Spirit in preparing the heart for its reception in regeneration; nevertheless, it is that means appointed by the wisdom of God for the salvation of His elect. This gives us confidence that when the Word is preached it will be successful in the salvation of those ordained to life by the Spirit.

John Owen, in his reflections on Hebrews 2:3, states, “ It (the Gospel) is salvation efficiently, in that it is the great instrument which God is pleased to use in and for the collation and bestowing salvation upon His elect. Hence the Apostle calls it ‘the power of God unto salvation’ (Rom. 1:16); because God in and by it exerts His mighty power in the saving of them that believe; as it is again called (1 Cor. 1:18). Hence there is a saving power ascribed unto the Word itself. And therefore Paul commits believers unto the Word of grace,’ as that which is ‘able to build them up, and give them an inheritance among all them that are sanctified’ (Acts 20:32). And James calls it ‘the ingrafted Word, which is able to save our souls’ (1:21); *the might power of Christ being put forth in it, and accompanying it for that purpose*. But this will the better appear if we consider the several principal parts of this salvation, and the efficiency of the Word as the instrument of God in the communication of it unto us; as—

“1. In the *regeneration* and sanctification of the elect, the first external act of this salvation. This is wrought by the Word (1 Pet. 1:23); ‘Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever;’ wherein not only the thing itself, or our regeneration by the Word but the manner of it also is declared. *It is by the collation of a new spiritual life upon us, whereof the Word is the seed*. As every life proceeds from some seed, that hath in itself virtually the whole life, to be educed from it by natural ways and means, so the Word in the hearts of men is turned into a *vital principle*, that, cherished by *suitable means*, puts forth vital acts and operations. By this means we are ‘born of God’ and ‘quicken’d,’ who ‘by nature are children of wrath, dead in trespasses and sins,— I confess it doth not do this work by any power resident in itself, and always necessarily accompanying its administration, for then all would be so regenerated unto whom it was preached, and there would be no neglecters of it. But it is the instrument of God for this end, and mighty and powerful through God it is for the accomplishment of it .

“2. It is so in the *communication of the Spirit* unto them that do believe, to furnish them with the gifts and graces of the kingdom of heaven, and to interest them in all those privileges

of this salvation which God is pleased in this life to impart unto us and to entrust us withal. So the apostle dealing with the Galatians about their backsliding from the Gospel, asketh them whether they ‘received the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the Word of faith’ (Gal 3:2); that is the Gospel . . . And He is given unto us by the Gospel on many accounts:—

“(1) Because He is the *gift and grant of the author of the Gospel, as to all the especial ends and concernments of salvation* . . . And this is the great privilege of the Gospel, that the author of it is alone the donor and bestower of the Holy Spirit; which of what concernment it is in the business of our salvation, all men know who have any acquaintance with these things.

“(2) *He is promised in the Gospel and therein alone.* All the promises of the Scripture, whether in the Old Testament or New, whose subject is the Spirit, are evangelical; they all belong unto and are parts of the Gospel. For the law had no promise of the Spirit, or any privilege by Him, annexed unto it. And hence He is called “The Spirit of promise,” (Eph. 1:13); who, next unto the person of Christ, was the great subject of promises from the foundation of the world.

“(3) *By these promises* are believers actually and really *made partakers of the Spirit.* They are the chariots that bring this Holy Spirit into our souls (2 Pet. 1:4). By these ‘great and precious promises’ is the ‘divine nature’ communicated unto us, so far forth as unto the indwelling of this blessed Spirit.

“3. In our *justification.* And this hath so great a share in this salvation that it is often called salvation itself; and they that are justified are said to be saved (Eph. 2:18) . . .

Because in every justification *there must be a righteousness before God,* on the account whereof the person to be justified is to be pronounced and declared righteous, this is tendered, proposed, and exhibited unto us in and by the Gospel . . . Now, Christ with His whole righteousness, and all the benefits thereof, are tendered unto us, and given unto or bestowed on them that do believe, by the promise of the Gospel. Therein is He preached and proposed as crucified before our eyes, and we are invited to accept of Him; which the souls of believers through the Gospel do accordingly.

And *faith* itself, whereby we receive the Lord Jesus for all the ends for which He is tendered unto us, and become actually interested in all the fruits and benefits of His mediation, is wrought in us by the Word of the Gospel: for, as we have declared, it is the seed of all grace whatever; and in especial, ‘faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God’ (Rom. 10:17). Conviction of sin is by the law; but faith is by the Gospel. And this is the way and means which God hath appointed on our part for the giving us an actual interest in justification, as established in the law of the Gospel, (Rom. 5:1)’ Again:—

*“The promise of the Gospel conveyed unto the soul by the Holy Spirit, and entertained by faith, completes the justification of a believer in his own conscience,*

and gives him assured peace with God. And thus the whole work of this main branch of our salvation is wrought by the Gospel.

“4. There is in this salvation an *instruction and growth in spiritual wisdom*, and an acquaintance with the ‘mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ’ (Col. 2:2); which is an effect of the Gospel. Of ourselves we are not only dark and ignorant of heavenly things, but ‘darkness’ itself,— that is, utterly blind, and incomprehensive of spiritual, divine mysteries (Eph. 5:8); and so under ‘the power of darkness’ (Col. 1:13), as that we should no less than the devils themselves be holden unto the chains of it unto the judgment of the great day. Darkness and ignorance as to the things of God themselves, in respect of revelation of them, and darkness in the mind as to the whole understanding of them, in a right manner, being revealed, is upon the whole world; and no heart is able to conceive, not tongue to express, the greatness and misery of this darkness. The removal hereof is a mercy inexpressible,— the beginning of our entrance into heaven, the kingdom of light and glory, and an especial part of our salvation . . . Now, the removal hereof is by the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:6), ‘God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;’ and He doeth it by the illumination of the glorious Gospel of Christ (v.4). For not only is the object revealed hereby, ‘life and immortality being brought to light by the Gospel,’ but also the eyes of our understanding are enlightened by it, savingly to discern the truths by it revealed: for it is by it that both the eyes of the blind are opened and light shineth unto them that sit in darkness; whence we are said to be ‘called out of darkness into His marvelous light’ (1 Pet. 2:9). And our calling is no otherwise but by the Word of the Gospel. And as the implanting of this heavenly light in us is by the Word, so the growth and increase of it in spiritual wisdom is no otherwise wrought (2 Cor. 3:18; Col 2:2). And this spiritual acquaintance with God in Christ, this saving wisdom in the mystery of grace, this holy knowledge and understanding of the mind of God, this growing light and insight into heavenly things, which is begun, increased, and carried on by the Gospel, is an especial dawning of that glory and immortality which this salvation tendeth ultimately unto.” (Exposition of Hebrews Vol. 2. pp 297-301).

This quotation from the pen of the Puritan John Owen fully illustrates, how the Gospel is the power and wisdom of God. Though we have not been able to quote in full from Dr. Owen on this much misunderstood subject, yet, a full meditation on what is given here will guard against any belittling of the Gospel, unintentionally or otherwise. Oh, how necessary it is that we give proper value to the Gospel, and preach it in its fullness!

Let us be grateful and filled with thanksgiving to the Lord that He not only has all power, but that He has seen fit to exercise this power towards some of the human race in a way of mercy in providing a full redemption and justification from the guilt and misery of sin. Let us praise Him that He has seen fit to demonstrate this power in the Gospel wherein He makes known His mercy and brings men unto a saving knowledge of Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ. If you do not know this Christ as He is revealed in His Gospel, the power of God will be just as effectual toward you in judgment and condemnation as it is in the deliverance of sinners through Christ. “Look unto Him, and be ye saved.” There is salvation in none other. The Bible states it unequivocally “Neither is there salvation in any other: for

there is no other name under heaven given among men, by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). You can only know Him savingly as He is revealed unto faith in the fullness of His Person as declared in the Word. Sinner, flee to Him from the wrath to come, and then you can find comfort in this attribute of power.

## 5. THE WISDOM OF GOD

Wisdom is that attribute, or perfection of God that directs and governs His knowledge, power, goodness and purpose. God only is absolutely wise, and demonstrates His wisdom through His works: “To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever, Amen.” (Rom. 16:27). “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, THE ONLY WISE GOD, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Tim. 1:17). “O Lord how manifold are they works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.” (Ps 104:24).

First, God’s wisdom appears in His *Decree*. After having spoken of God’s decree of election in Romans 9, 10 and 11 the apostle breaks out with praise in 11:33, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” “Hence the decrees of God which are at once fixed with the highest wisdom, are called counsels; though His counsels are without consultation, and His determinations without deliberation; of which He has no need. As He sees in His understanding, what is fittest to be done, His wisdom directs His will to determine at once, what shall be done. His wisdom directs His will to determine, at once, what shall be done; and this is seen in appointing the end for which they are to be, in ordaining means suitable and conducive to that end; and in pitching upon the most proper time for execution; and in guarding against everything that may hinder that.” (John Gill). Then Dr. Gill points out that the end of all things is His own glory, and that He appoints the proper means to be used in the proper time for bringing about His glory. Certainly, this is infinite wisdom that can take the seemingly contradictory events of the multitude of creatures and accomplish the end of bringing glory to Himself through such unlikely means.

Second, the wisdom of God is seen in *Creation*. The Lord “by wisdom made the heavens” (Ps 136:5). “The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. (Prov 3:19). The wisdom of God appears “(1) In the vast variety of creatures which He hath made. Hence the Psalmist cries out, ‘O LORD, how many are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.’ (Ps 104:24).

(2) In the admirable and beautiful order and situation of the creatures. God hath marshaled everything in its proper place and sphere. For instance, the sun, by its position displays the infinite wisdom of its Creator. It is placed in the midst of the planets, to enlighten them with its brightness, and inflame them with its heat, and thereby derive to them such benign qualities as to make them beneficial to all mixed bodies. If it were raised as high as the stars, the earth would lose its prolific value, and remain a dead carcass for want of its quickening heat; and if it were placed as low as the moon, the air would be inflamed with excessive heat, the waters would be dried up, and every plant scorched. But at the due distance at which it is placed, it purifies the air, abates the superfluities of the waters, temperately warms the earth, and so serves all the purposes of life and vegetation. It could not be in another position without the disorder and hurt of universal nature . . .

(3) In fitting everything for its proper end and use, so that nothing is unprofitable and useless. After the most diligent and accurate inquiry into the works of God, there is noting to be found superfluous, and there is noting defective.

(4) In the subordination of all parts to one common end. Though they are of different natures, as lines vastly different in themselves, yet they all meet in one common center, namely, the good and preservation of the whole. ‘I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the grain, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.’ (Hos 2:21,22).” (Thomas Boston).

Third, the wisdom of God appears in *Redemption*. And this is seen

(1) In the choice of the Person of our Redeemer. Our Redeemer could not be a man as we, for all men by nature are under sin, and must answer to justice for this sin. Therefore, if Christ the Redeemer were just a man, He would die for the guilt of His *own* sins, but have no merit in His death for others. Also, it could not be an angel who became our Redeemer, for they are of another nature, and cannot enter into the miseries of sin with us. God elected His own Son, who is truly God, the second Person of the Trinity, to render obedience and provide a full redemption for us. Now the Son, *as He is God*, could not enter into the misery of sin, nor take upon Himself our infirmity to answer to justice for us! Therefore, wisdom planned that He would be born in time and take to Himself a full humanity. Through this He would have full merit to redeem, because He is God; and He would be able to enter into the miseries of our sin, because He is man. But, there is the problem of Him being guilty of in Himself in having been born of a woman. Here again wisdom removes the problem by having His conception brought about without the aid of man. The curse of sin is passed along by the man, therefore Christ being conceived of a virgin was *without sin and original guilt*. Now, the Redeemer being perfect, sinless man could be made under the law in order to yield perfect obedience to it for perfect righteousness; and He could take upon Himself the curse of the Law, and pay a full price into the hand of justice for the removal of the curse from those whom He represents as Surety. Again, the Redeemer being not only perfect man, but infinite God can give infinite value and merit to His work of obedience, wherein He can provide a perfect righteousness for all the redeemed. How marvelous is this wisdom that could provide a salvation for sinners and do no harm to the holiness and justice of God.

(2) The wisdom of God is seen in *the persons redeemed*. Christ did not redeem all of mankind, but some of all sorts from mankind. Therefore in redemption there is illustrated His mercy, and that He is no respecter of persons in that He died for some from *all ranks and stations of life*. In that He did not die for *all* is the sovereignty of God illustrated. In the passing over of some His justice is demonstrated. God has the right to damn all to Hell, “for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23). His justice demands it, but in the death of Christ justice is satisfied for the people of His choice (Eph. 1:4) and in Hell justice will exercise itself throughout eternity upon others.

(3) The manner and means of salvation is a manifestation of the wisdom of God; that salvation should be by *faith* and 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. The way of working faith declares God’s wisdom; it is wrought by the Word preached. ‘Faith cometh by hearing’ (Rom. 10:17). 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 show His wisdom by that which seems folly. ‘He hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.’ (1 Cor. 1:27). Why so? ‘That no flesh should glory in His presence’ (1 Cor. 1:29). Should God convert by the ministry of angels, then we should have been already

to have gloried in angels, and have given that honor 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. ‘We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not from us.’ (2 Cor. 4:7). Herein is God’s wisdom seen, that *no flesh may glory in His presence.*” (Thomas Watson 1646 AD).

Fourth, the wisdom of God is seen in providence. One, with any observation of events, can see this without comment. It is wisdom in providing each creature with its particular nature and instinct. There is a complete cycle in the life of creatures and although there may be destruction by one of another, yet there is a dependence one upon another. God’s wisdom is best seen in the affairs of men. He takes a method wherein it seems that He will destroy a man *yet* through this bring him into His desired place for Him in power and usefulness. This is beautifully seen in the life of Joseph; a young man hated by his brothers; one that would not partake of their sins, but reproved them for their sin. He was sold into slavery and a deception foisted upon his father to think him dead; found in unpleasant circumstances in the place of his captivity; finally exalted to the throne to rule and all this that the Lord might feed and care for His people during a famine that was ordained to come to pass. If you and I could see how every small event is working out God’s purpose —no matter how adverse in our lives— we would exclaim with the apostle Paul, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).

## 6. THE HOLINESS OF GOD

“The next attribute is God’s holiness. ‘Glorious in holiness’ (Ex. 15:11). Holiness is the most sparkling jewel of His crown; it is the name by which God is known: ‘Holy and reverend is his name,’ (Ps. 111:9). ‘He is the holy one.’ ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.’ (Is. 6:3, cf Rev. 4:8). His power makes Him mighty; His holiness makes Him glorious. (Ex. 15:11). God’s holiness consists in His perfect love of righteousness and abhorrence of evil. ‘of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.’ (Hab. 1:13).” (Watson).

Holiness belongs unto God: unto the Father. (John 17:11), the Son (Luke 4:34) and the Spirit (Rom. 1:4). Holiness belongs to God essentially. It is that which is necessary to His nature. He would cease to be God if He were not holy. Holiness belongs to God originally. He is the source and fountain of all holiness. Any holiness seen in the creature is from Him. Holiness belongs to God underivatively. It being original with Him; it is derived from no one or thing. Even when God dwelt alone He was the great holy One. Holiness belongs unto God perfectly. All holiness that is within the creature has a flaw but in God it is infinitely perfect, with nothing being added to it. Holiness belongs to God immutably. He always has been, He ever will be, the holy One. None of His works have ever necessitated a change in this glorious attribute, but contrariwise, they magnify it. “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.” (Ps 145:17)

God’s holiness is displayed in many and various ways. His holiness is seen in creation, “holy in all his works.” When the creation left His hand it was very good. Man was created upright and in righteousness, but sinned against God and brought misery upon himself. “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many devices.” (Eccles. 7:29). Even Satan was created by God as an angel of great beauty and holiness, and it was the turning away of his own heart that brought him into the misery of being Satan (Ezek. 28:15). God’s holiness is seen in His law. (Rom. 7:12). The law spells out His holy nature and states what standard of holiness God requires of His creatures. God’s holiness is displayed in election (Eph. 1:4). It was never the purpose of election to give men an excuse to sin and do nothing. The doctrine, rightly understood, will never produce such ill effects, but will lead to a holy God-honoring life. Not only has God elected us to salvation (If indeed ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. 1 Pe 2:3) (2 Thess 2:13), but unto holiness. His predestination of men is not only unto the adoption of sons (Eph. 1:5), but unto conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-30). Those who are elected unto salvation will be effectually called of the Spirit, regenerated, and given faith and repentance which purifies the heart. Without holiness no man can boast that he has any part in the redemption of Christ. (Heb. 12:14). It is this which gives evidence of one’s election. God’s holiness is displayed in the Covenant of Grace. (Ezek. 36:25-27). The objects of mercy in the Covenant of Grace are sinners; the purpose is to bring them to glory. To effect this the Covenant promises cleansing and a new heart as means to this end. Justification displays the holiness of God (2 Cr. 5:21). Justification is upon the righteousness of another, even Christ. Its purpose is to make us accepted experimentally, who by nature are children of wrath, and without a righteousness of our own. It shows the holiness of God in that God cannot receive us unto Himself apart from righteousness— which righteousness He Himself provides.

Because of His holiness, God of necessity hates sin, and must punish it (Prov. 3:32; 15:26; Ps. 5:5; 7:11). He is not the benign, tolerant ‘old man’ that the world conceives Him to be, who will turn a blind eye to the sins of the sinner who will say to all in the last day, “I cannot cast thee away, I must receive thee unto myself!” No! Far the opposite! God is so holy and just that He cannot but cast the sinner away who dies in his sins. My dear reader, don’t look beyond the grave for another change which will make everything right for you. *Every* sin will receive its just recompense of reward. If the punishment rightly due to you did not fall upon the Lamb of God; if He did not stand in your place as Surety and pay into the hand of God’s justice a full payment on account of your sins, you can mark it down, you will spend the rest of eternity in Hell under the displeasure and wrath of God in payment for your own sins. The matter can be put quite plainly, ‘either you have Christ or you perish!’ It is turn or burn. It is repent or die.

The holiness of God is the standard for the believer to follow. It is the believer’s desire to be conformed to the holiness of God and see the image of Christ in His own heart. The lack of holiness within the believer is that which plagues him and causes him to cry all the day long. I take the liberty to quote here fully from the Puritan, Thomas Watson.

“Is God so infinitely holy? Then let us endeavor to imitate God in holiness. ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy.’ (1 Pet. 1:16). There is a twofold holiness; a holiness of equality, and a holiness of similitude. A holiness of equality no man or angel can reach to. Who can be equally holy with God? Who can parallel Him in His sanctity? But there is a holiness of similitude, and that we must aspire after, to have some analogy and resemblance of God’s holiness in us, to be as like Him in holiness as we can. Though a taper does not give as much light as the sun, yet it resembles it. We must imitate God in holiness.”

“Question. If we must be like God in holiness, wherein does our holiness consist?

Answer. In two things; in our suitableness to God’s nature, and in our subjection to His will.”

“Our holiness consists in our suitableness to the nature of God. Hence the saints are said to partake of the divine nature, which is not a partaking of His essence, but His image. Herein is the saint’s holiness, when they are the lively pictures of God. They bear the image of God’s meekness, mercifulness, heavenliness; they are of the same judgment with God, of the same disposition; they love what He loves, and hate what He hates.”

“Our holiness consists also in our subjection to the will of God. As God’s nature is the pattern of holiness, so His will is the rule of holiness. It is our holiness when we do His will (Acts 13:22); when we bear His will (Mic. 7:9); when what He inflicts we suffer willingly. Our great care should be, to be like God in holiness. Our holiness should be qualified as God’s; as His is a real holiness, ours should be. ‘Righteousness and true holiness’ (Eph. 4:24). It should not be the paint of holiness, but the life; it should not be like the Egyptian temples, beautified without me rely, but like Solomon’s temple, gold within. ‘The king’s daughter is all glorious within’ (Ps 45:13). That I may press you to resemble God in holiness, consider

1. How illustrious every holy person is . . .

2. It is the great design God carries on in the world, to make a people like Himself in holiness.
3. Our holiness draws God's heart to us. Holiness is God's image; and God cannot choose but love His image where He sees it . . .
4. Holiness is the only thing that distinguishes us from the reprobate part of the world. God's people have His seal upon them. 'the foundation of God standeth firm, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' (2 Tim. 2:19). The people of God are sealed with a double seal. Election, 'The Lord knows who are His;' and sanctification, 'Let every one depart from iniquity.' As a nobleman is distinguished from another by his silver star; as a virtuous woman is distinguished from a harlot by her chastity; so holiness distinguishes between the two seeds. All that are of God have Christ for their Captain, and holiness is the white color they wear. (Heb 2:10).
5. Holiness is our honor. Holiness and honor are put together (1Thess. 4:4) . . .
6. Holiness gives us boldness with God. Thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacle and shalt lift up thy face to God. Lifting up the face is an emblem of boldness. Nothing can make us so ashamed to go to God as sin. A wicked man in prayer may lift up his hands, but he cannot lift up his face. When Adam had lost his holiness, he lost his confidence; he hid himself. But the holy person goes to God as a child to its father; his conscience does not upbraid him with allowing any sin, therefore he can go boldly to the throne of grace, and find mercy to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:16).
7. Holiness gives peace. Sin raises a storm in the conscience. "There is no peace to the wicked." (Is. 57:21). Righteousness and peace are put together. Holiness is the root which bears this sweet fruit of peace; righteousness and peace kiss each other.
8. Holiness leads to heaven. It is the King of heaven's highway. "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it." (Is. 35:8). At Rome there were temples of virtue and honor, and all were to go through the temple of virtue to the temple of honor; so we must go through the temple of holiness to the temple of heaven. Glory begins in virtue. "Who hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). Happiness is nothing else but the quintessence of holiness; holiness is glory militant, and happiness holiness triumphant."

## 7. THE JUSTICE OF GOD

Another of God's attributes is His justice! "for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.." (Deut. 32:4), "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice." (Job 37:23), "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." (Ps. 98:14).

Justice is God's righteous treatment of all, giving them their due. This is an attribute found in all persons of the Trinity: in the Father (John 17:25), in the Son (1 John 2:1), and in the Spirit (John 16:8). In that God is just and righteous He takes to Himself that which is His due, and works all things for His own glory. In that He is just, the creature has no right to question Him in anything He does. In believing Him to be absolutely just we willingly submit to His ways in all things.

God's justice towards man is twofold, or in two parts. There is His remunerative justice, wherein He distributes rewards to those whom they are due. And there is His punitive justice wherein He punishes those to whom it is due. The rewards that are given are not from any merit in the creature, but they are rewards of His own promises and grace. God is indebted to none, therefore when He uses the wicked for the accomplishing of His purposes He will reward them with temporal blessings, which does not by any means infer that He lightens the punishment He has laid up for them which is due unto their sins. No! for God will punish the wicked with sore misery. And though it seems that they are having their hey-day now, it is nothing more than their being fattened for the slaughter. From the light of nature man knows that God must punish sin. "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they who commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." (Rom. 1:32). "For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law to themselves: Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;" (Rom. 2:14). God declares in His Word that He will, in justice, punish sin: "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation." (Ex. 34:6-7). From the perfection of God's nature we know that He must punish sin. He would not be holy nor just if He overlooked the guilty. He has promised that "the wages of sin is death," and He must pay those wages. He has stated that "the soul that sinneth it shall die." and He must stand behind His Word, because He is truth. He cannot overlook sin and remain holy and just! This explains why the Son of God must become man and take upon Himself the guilt of the elect. Once God had determined to save a people He had to appoint them a Surety to meet the demands of justice for them. The sinner being unrighteous and unable to pay the debt of sin into the hand of justice must have One of his own nature who *is* sinless, and able to pay his debt, to stand for him. Therefore, Christ, the elect's federal Head and Representative, stood in their stead by establishing the righteousness of the law in His perfect obedience, and by removing the curse of the law in His death on the cross. In this God the Father is "Just and the justifier of those who believe."

The very nature of sin demands that a just and holy God punish it. Sin is a poison that has infected the whole human race (Ps 51:3), is aimed against the honor and glory of God and is that which has taken man out of the pleasure of God. It is such a nature that even the angels were cast from the presence of God when they sinned. It is of such a nature that the sinner must be cast forever from the favor and presence of God, into Hell for eternity, unless his guilt has been removed by the satisfaction of Christ Jesus.

But here is an objection. 'God's own people suffer great afflictions; they are injured and persecuted. "For all the day long have I been afflicted, and chastened every morning." (Ps 73:14). How does this stand with God's justice?

"The answer is threefold:—

(1.) The Lord never afflicts His people without a cause; so that He cannot be unjust. There is some good in the godly, therefore the wicked afflict them; there is some evil in them, therefore God afflicts them. God's own children have their blemishes. "but are there not with you, even with you, sins against the LORD your God? (2 Chron. 28:10). These spiritual diamonds, have they no flaws? Do we not read of the spots of God's children? (Deut 32:5) Are they not guilty of much pride, censoriousness, passion, worldliness? Though, by their profession they seem to resemble the birds of paradise, to fly above, and feed upon the people of heaven; yet, as the serpent, they lick the dust. And these sins of God's people do more provoke God than others. "because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters." (Deut 32:19). The sins of others pierce Christ's side, these wound His heart. Therefore is not God just in all the evils that befall them? "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2). I will punish you sooner, surer, sorer, than others.

(2.) The trials and sufferings of the godly are to refine and purify them. God's furnace is in Sion (Is 31:9). Is it any injustice in God to put His gold into the furnace to purify it? Is it any injustice in God, by afflicting His people, to make them partakers of His holiness? (Heb 12:10). What more proclaims God's faithfulness, than to take such a course with them as may make them better? "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." (Ps 119:75).

(3.) What injustice is it in God to inflict a less punishment, and to prevent a greater? The best of God's children have that in them which is meritorious of Hell. Does God do them wrong, if He uses only the rod, where they have deserved the scorpion? Is the father unjust, if He only corrects his child, who has deserved to be disinherited? If God deals so favorably with His children, He only puts wormwood in their cup, whereas He might put fire and brimstone. They should rather admire His mercy than complain of His injustice." (T. Watson).

## 8. THE GOODNESS OF GOD

Another of God's attributes is His goodness. He is originally and essentially good within Himself; whereas all goodness that is seen in man, the creature, is derived from Him, and is a remaining reflection of His image upon him. "Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes." (Ps. 119:68). The Lord Jesus, in answer to the rich young ruler, upon his statement of Christ being the good Master, but evidenced no recognition of His Godhead, answered him by saying, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17). This means that absolute essential goodness belongs only unto the Lord. It does not mean that Christ was not good, but this served as a rebuke to this young man in that he did not recognize Christ as God. Therefore, Christ is saying, If I am nothing more than man, do not recognize me as absolutely good, for there is none good but One, i.e. God. But Christ *is* God, and Christ *is* good. Goodness is ascribed to the Persons of the Trinity; to the Father, "the good Father" (2 Chron. 30:18); to the Son, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." (John 10:11); to the Spirit, "Thou gavest also they good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst." (Neh. 9:20).

God's goodness is displayed, first in *creation*. "The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. (Ps.145:9). "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. (Gen. 1:13) God's goodness in creation is seen in every aspect, but it would take a blind man not to see it especially in man. God has made food for man that is pleasant to the taste and appealing to his senses, therefore eating is a pleasure and not a burden. The makeup of the body is an illustration of the goodness of God. He has so placed the tender nerves within walls of protection that man is not in constant pain. He has given to man an intelligence so that he can provide for himself that which is necessary in life. He has given him a conscience so that man is kept from much that would be evil to him. His great goodness is seen in that He has placed a spiritual faculty within man that is never satisfied without a knowledge of God, and He takes it upon Himself to reveal Himself to some and bring them into the satisfaction of knowing Him in salvation. Also, every moment of your life is an act of God's goodness, for every moment you live you are kept from Hell, which all *deserve*. Second, God's goodness is seen in *Providence*. "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living creature. The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.(Ps. 145:17). In His providence there is a common goodness that is upon all creatures without exception. These are His general mercies of daily provision, care, protection, etc. There is a special providence of God upon the elect, wherein God's goodness provides a special protection from Satan, death, and Hell; brings them into circumstances and experiences that are used for their conviction and preservation from many sins; and, finally, to the effectual hearing of the Gospel, justification by faith, repentance on the account of sins, and a saving closing with Christ. My reader, it might be that God has manifested His goodness toward thee for such a moment as this. Those disappointments in providence could be His workings to break you loose from the world, to show you that things of the world are not the most noble, but that spiritual blessings are the most noble of all. Why is it that He has not long ago taken your life while you were in a fit of sinning? Why is it that He has not long ago cast you into Hell? Why is it that you have found recovery from

an illness that has taken others to the grave? Why is it that He will not give sleep to your eyes but you toss upon your bed with fears and uncertainties? Why has He taken a wife, a child, a friend, from you? Why is it that every sermon, the Bible, the presence of the righteous, is a burden to you? This is all His goodness toward you in a special providence! The goodness of God leadeth you to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Every temporal mercy is crying, “repent!” Every happiness that you enjoy is crying, “repent!” Every good word from another is God’s providence crying, “repent!” Every sickness is a goodness of God restraining you from further sins. Every loneliness, adverse circumstance, conflict, heartache, is the goodness of God to awaken you to your need of Christ, and cries, “repent!” Every thought and fear of Hell is the goodness of God crying, “repent!” If these are special providences of His goodness you cannot escape! He will tighten the cords around your neck until He breaks your stubbornness and lays you in the dust at His feet crying for mercy in Christ!. O, how good is God who will not let His elect forever run in the way of sin, but will arrest them and bring them to Christ. This leads to the third display of God’s goodness, i.e. *redemption*. It is the goodness of God that He has not placed salvation upon the grounds of the covenant of works. It is the goodness of God that the wages of sin were paid to Jesus Christ, and that His taking to Himself the guilt of the sins of the elect, and coming into union with them, they are justified upon His merits and work. It is God’s goodness to send His Son into the world to accomplish redemption. It is God’s goodness that He did not leave us in the slave-market of sin. It is His goodness that He found a ransom. Ah, He could have cast the whole human race into Hell. He did not need us. It is His goodness to purpose the redemption of the elect! Praise His name forever for this attribute.

You say, “Ah, but if God is good why does He punish sin at all? Why does He hate the sinner and punish him that is guilty? Would He be good if He refused to honor and vindicate his law? Would it be good if He left the evil in the presence of the saints forever, and showed no difference? Ah, no! It is His goodness that He will not allow His law to be trampled upon; and that He will separate His saints unto Himself; and cast away that which is evil. “And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”(Ex. 33:19). Here we see that it is an act of goodness that God makes a difference, and shows mercy to whom He will. “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, to the third and to the fourth generation.” (Ex. 34:6 -7) Here it is clearly stated that it is the goodness of the Lord not only to forgive sin, but also to punish the guilty even to the fourth generation. What a God is Moses’ God! There is none else beside Him! Let all the earth stand in awe and praise Him!

## 9. THE MERCY OF GOD

The next attribute of God for consideration is His mercy. Mercy is inseparable from God's goodness in that it is an effect or result of goodness. "O give thanks to the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." (Ps. 136:1). Mercy is that attribute of God that presupposes man's misery. Mercy works from love to relieve this. First, I will point out the characteristics of God's mercy.

[1] Mercy is natural and essential to Him as God. "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," (Ex. 34:6). It is natural and essential that God, as Governor, should have the misery of His creatures at heart. This we see in that He is longsuffering, and does not afflict willingly, but tenders to man appeals for the removal of his misery, which are rejected and despised by man. When God shaves off a nation He is said to do it with a borrowed razor (Is. 7:20); His acts of severity are rather forced from Him as necessary acts of justice toward a rebellious and stiff-necked people (Is. 27:4; Lam. 3:33). Mercy is a darling attribute, and is the work of His right hand, while punishment is His strange work (Is. 28:21). God's mercy is a lodestone to draw sinners to Him, and without this all other attributes would be fearful, and God would be unapproachable.

It is natural that God as a Father should show mercy toward the elect who have been chosen and adopted to make up His family. Whereas the above expression of mercy in general: towards all men; appealing to their natural faculties, this is special wherein God's sovereignty is displayed in that He will be merciful to whom He will be merciful in the actual removal of sin's misery from those of His free grace choice. (Rom. 9:10,18).

[2.] Mercy, is the act of God's own goodness and has no cause outside of Himself. God's only obligation to display mercy is in Himself and not in the creature. Although mercy has as its objects man in misery, yet, man's misery is not the cause of mercy. "When its boughs are withered, they shall be broken off: the women come, and set them on fire: for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favour." (Is. 27:11). Man does not merit God's favor by his works: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit;" (Tit 3:5). The work and merits of Christ are not the cause of mercy, but are rather an effect or fruit of mercy: "Through the tender mercy of our God; with which the dayspring from on high hath visited us," (Luke 1:78).

[3.] God's mercy is infinite, i.e. it is overflowing; without bottom. God is "plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 86:5); He is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4); He has "multitude of mercies" (Ps. 51:1); His mercies "are new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). There is not and never will be any need but that there is a mercy to meet it. God's mercy can never be drained out, but is new in store for every saint in every condition.

[4.] God's mercy is eternal. Mercy is as eternal as God Himself in being a part of His essence and nature. God could no more cease being merciful than He could stop being God.

“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him (Ps. 103:17). That His mercy endures for ever is repeated twenty-six times in Ps. 136. What comfort this should give to sinners that have been awakened to their need of Christ and are now resting at His feet for mercy. He cannot cast you off any more than He can cast away His eternal mercy. Cling to Him in faith! His mercy endures forever.

[5.] His mercy is immutable. I mean by this that He cannot change in His mercy. As His mercy is everlasting, it is unchanging. God is not fickle as man who changes from one object of favor to another, but ever keeps His objects of favor before Him. Ah, dear friend, think not that God will forsake you in your time of weakness and stumbling. If you have renounced all hope in your own righteousness, if you are pleading mercy through Christ, if you are by faith seeking God’s favor, if you have the witness of His grace in stirring you to seek you to seek Him while He may be found, worry not, for He will not leave you. “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” (Mal. 3:6).

[6.] God’s mercy is common to all Persons of the blessed Trinity. It is the Father’s mercy, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Pet. 1:3). It is said to be by the Son’s mercy: “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life.” (Jude 21). It is the mercy of the Holy Spirit: this is by way of implication in the work of mercy that He does for us; “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” (Rom. 8:26)

The mercy of God should be of comfort and encouragement to all; to the saints Those who have a steadfast hope in Christ should look upon Him as one clothed in mercy, who has opened the way of the mercy seat that we might call upon Him in every need. Ah, how this attribute of God should close our mouths from murmuring and fretting; how it should drive us to our knees in every situation to plead His mercy in our behalf; how it should encourage us to know that He has mercy enough for our every need. Also, dear saint, continue to look to His mercy and goodness for preserving grace. Never depend upon yourself for the least expression of grace in the performance of duties. Lean heavily upon Him. To the awakened, you have been made, by the Spirit of God, to see your misery and danger. Fears have gripped your heart, and you have thought that every moment would find you in Hell. Your sins have marched before you one by one with horrid faces to add to your misery. You have wondered whether Christ would regard one such as you. You know that you deserve Hell. You know that there is nothing within you that you can bring before the Lord that will merit your pardon. Listen, sinner, your very awakening and conviction is an act of God in mercy. It is mercy that He did not leave you hardened in your conscience against Him. It is His mercy that He gave you a hearing ear and rooted you out of your lethargy to seek Him. Don’t rest in your feelings! Go to Him in faith! Take hold upon the cross of Christ and plead for mercy there! Reason with God that He broke your heart, and that in His mercy He receives broken hearts! Oh, realize that He who begins a good work of mercy will not forsake you, but will finish His work in you. Thank Him for His mercy in awakening you. “Yet awakening is not a thing to rest in, or to desire to have lengthened out month after

month. If I start up in a fright and find my house on fire, I do not sit down at the edge of the bed and say to myself, 'I hope I am truly awakened!' Indeed I am deeply grateful that I am not left to sleep on! No, I want to escape from a threatened death and I hasten to the door or to the window, that I may get out and not perish where I am. It would be a questionable boon to be aroused and yet not escape from danger. Remember, awakening is not salvation. A man may know that he is lost, and yet never be saved. He may be made thoughtful and yet he may die in his sins. If you find out that you are bankrupt, the consideration of your debts will not pay them. A man may examine his wounds all the year round and they will be none the nearer being healed because he feels their smart, and notes their number. It is one trick of the devil to tempt a man to be satisfied with a sense of sin; and another trick of the same deceiver to insinuate that the sinner may not be content to trust Christ, unless he can bring a certain measure of despair to add to the Saviour's finished work. Our awakenings are not to help the Saviour, but help us to the Saviour. To imagine that my feeling of sin is to assist in the removal of sin is absurd. It is as though I said that water could not cleanse my face unless I had looked longer in the glass and had counted the smuts on my forehead. A sense of need of salvation by grace is a very healthful sign; but one needs wisdom to use it aright, and not make an idol of it. (Spurgeon - 'Around the Wicket Gate'). Sinner, don't rest until you are resting in Christ. Don't stop short of Him by thinking your convictions are enough. Let these drive you to Him who is able to heal. Plead His mercy, and believe Him to have the mercy to relieve your misery.

"Come humble souls, with guilt oppressed,  
No longer yield to doubt;  
Come, says the Saviour, to my breast,  
I will not cast you out."

To the sinner; you have not yet awakened to your need of Christ; you yet do not see the danger that you are in, you yet do not see that Hell is moved toward you. You go from day to day as though you would live eternally here and as if there were no judgment awaiting you. Your thoughts are never about death, your own death, and the day of reckoning. But it is coming nevertheless. You live as though you were safe and secured for ever. It is a mercy that God has not already cast you into Hell. Though I would not want you to take a carnal encouragement in the mercy of God to continue in your way, I would plead with you that the mercy of God should encourage you to consider that God has spared you from Hell and death for a purpose. As long as there is life there is hope that you are one of God's elect. Spurn not His mercy, but see your need of Christ. Plead with God for awakening mercy. Wait upon the ministry of the Word with the desire that your danger and misery shall be shown to you. Oh, may the longsuffering and mercy of God lead you to repentance! If you continue in your sin you shall know that God's justice is not tempered with mercy for you. God will not remain silent forever. The soul that sins *will die*. The wages of sin *is* death. It is Christ or perish. It is turn or burn. Mercy cannot be found in your natural birth, baptism, works, nor the exercise of your own self determination. The mercy of God unto eternal life is in Christ *alone*. Look unto Christ, for only He can give you a thirsting heart to drink of the living water. Look upon your sin with horror for it is the monster that *separates you* from the mercy of God! Oh may some sinner today be awakened to their lost, ruined and undone condition before a holy and righteous God, who will by no means clear the guilty; (Ex. 34:7)

and find rest in Christ. “Because he hath appointed a day, when he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; of which he hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Ac 17:31). “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.”