

Monergism

# **THE DOCTRINE OF GOD**

JOHN DAGG

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## by John Dagg

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# **Introduction**

## **Duty Of Love To God**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." (Dt 6:5). In this manner the Bible commands the chief of all duties. No reasons are assigned for the requirement. No proof is adduced that God exists, or that he possesses such perfections as entitle him to the supreme love of his creatures. Jehovah steps forth before the subjects of his government, and issues his command. He waits for no formal introduction. He lifts up his voice with majesty. Without promise, and without threat, he proclaims his law, and leaves his subjects to their responsibility.

From the manner of this announcement, we may derive instruction. It is not necessary that we should enter into a formal demonstration that God exists, or a formal investigation of his attributes, before we begin the duty of loving him. We already know enough of him for this; and to postpone the performance of the duty until we have completed our investigations, is to commence them with unsanctified hearts, and in rebellion against God. From the dawn of our being we have had demonstrations of God's existence and character, blazing around us like the light of noonday. The heavens and the earth have declared his glory; his ministers and people have proclaimed his name; he is not to us an unknown God, except so far as our minds are willfully blind to the displays of his glory. If, therefore, we withhold the affections of our hearts, we can have no excuse in the plea that more evidence is needed. And with hearts so alienated from God at the outset, all our religious inquiries are likely to be unprofitable. What probability is there that further proof will

produce its proper impression and effect on our minds, if that which is already in our possession is unheeded or abused? If, from what we already know of God, we admire and love him, we shall desire to know more of him, and shall prosecute the study with profit and delight; but, if we have already shut him out of our hearts, all our intellectual investigations respecting him may be expected to leave us in spiritual blindness.

The duty required corresponds, in character, to the religion, of which it is an essential part. Heathen gods could not claim the supreme love of their worshipers; and heathen minds had no idea of a religion founded on supreme love to their deities. To some extent, they were objects of fear; and much that appertained to their supposed character and history, served for amusement, or to interest the imagination; but the conduct attributed to them was often such as even heathen virtue disapproved. Hence, they could not be objects of supreme love; and no one claimed it for them. The requirement of supreme love demonstrates the religion of the Bible to be from the true God; and when we begin our religious investigations with the admission of the obligation, and the full recognition of it in our hearts, we may be assured that we are proceeding in the right way.

The simplicity of the requirement is admirable. No explanation of the duty is needed. Forms of worship may be numerous and various, and questions may arise as to the forms which will be most acceptable. Many outward duties of morality are often determined with much difficulty. Perplexing questions arise as to the nature of repentance and faith, and the uninformed need instruction respecting them. But no one needs to be told what love is; the humblest mind can understand the requirement, and may feel pleasure in the consciousness of rendering obedience to it; and the learned philosopher stands in the presence of this precept as a little child, and feels its power binding every faculty that he possesses. This simple principle pervades all religion, and binds all intelligences, small and great, to God, the center of the great system. Between it and the

power of gravitation in the natural world, which binds atoms and masses, pebbles and vast planets, a beautiful analogy may be traced.

The comprehensiveness of the precept is not less admirable. From it rises the precept, Love your neighbor as yourself; and on these two all the law rests. We love our neighbors because they are God's creatures, and the subjects of his government, and because he has commanded us. We love God supremely, because he is the greatest and best of beings; and we love other beings, according to the importance of each in the universal system of being. One principle pervades both precepts, as one principle of gravitation binds the earth to the sun, and the parts of the earth to each other. This law binds angels to the throne of God, and to each other; and binds men and angels together, as fellow-subjects of the same sovereign. The decalogue is this law expanded, and adapted to the condition and relations of mankind. Love is not only the fulfilling of the law, but it is also the essence of gospel morality. All Christian obedience springs from it; and, without it, no form of obedience is acceptable to God. He who loves God supremely, cannot be guilty of that unbelief which makes God a liar, and he cannot reflect on the sins which he has committed against God, without sincere penitence.

We must not overlook the tendency of this precept to produce universal good. Every one knows how much the order and happiness found in human society, depend on love. If all kind affections were banished from the hearts of men, earth would be converted at once into a pandemonium. What love is left on earth renders it tolerable, and the love which reigns in Heaven makes it a place of bliss. Perfect obedience to the great law of love is sufficient to render all creatures happy. It opens, within the breast, a perennial source of enjoyment; and it meets, from without, the smile and blessing of an approving God.

Though the religion of love is clearly taught in the book of God only, yet, when we have learned it there, we can discover its agreement with natural religion. It will be useful to observe how the moral

tendencies of our nature accord, on this point, with the teachings of revelation.

The wickedness of man has been a subject of complaint in all ages. The ancient heathen complained of the degeneracy of their times, and talked of a golden age, long passed, in which virtue prevailed. In modern heathen nations, together with the depravity that prevails, some sense of that depravity exists; and everywhere the necessity or desirableness of a more virtuous state of society is admitted. In Christian lands, the very infidels, who scoff at all religion with one breath, will, with the next, satirize the wickedness of mankind. It is the united judgment of every nation, and every age, that the practice of men falls below their own standard of virtue. It is, therefore, necessary, in order to acquire the best notions of virtue that nature can give us, to turn away from the practice of men to those moral sentiments implanted in the human breast, which condemn this practice, and urge to higher virtue.

It is well known that men judge the actions of others with more severity than their own. Our appetites and passions interfere with the decisions of conscience, when our own conduct is the subject of examination. Hence, the general moral sense of mankind is a better standard of virtue than the individual conscience. In looking to the judgment of others, with a view to determine the morality of our actions, the judgment of those is especially to be regarded who are to be benefitted or injured by our deeds. Hence, natural religion approves the rule - Do unto others as you would, in like circumstances, that they should do unto you.

When the vice of others interferes with our happiness, we are then most keenly sensible of its existence and atrocity. However vague our notions of virtue may be, we always conceive of it as tending to promote the happiness of others. Yet it is not every tendency to promote happiness which we conceive to be virtuous. The food that we eat, and the couch on which we lie, tend to promote our happiness; yet we do not ascribe virtue to these inanimate things.

Virtue belongs only to rational and moral agents; and the promotion of happiness must be intentional to be accounted virtuous. There is still another limitation. Men sometimes confer benefits on others, with the expectation of receiving greater benefits in return. Where the motive for the action is merely the benefit expected in return, the common judgment of mankind refuses to characterize the deed as virtuous. To constitute virtue, there must be an intentional promotion of happiness in others; and this intention must be unselfish. Natural religion does not deny that a higher standard of morality may exist; but it holds that unselfish benevolence is virtue, and it determines that morality of actions by the unselfish benevolence which they exhibit.

Some have maintained that self-love is the first principle of virtue, its central affection, which spreading first to those most nearly related to us, extends gradually to others more remote, and widens at length into universal benevolence. This system of morality is self-contradictory. While it claims to aim at universal happiness, it makes it the duty of each individual to aim, not at this public good, but at this own private benefit. Whenever the interest of another comes in conflict with his own, it is made his duty to aim at the latter, and to promote that of his neighbor only so far as it may conduce to his own. It is true, that the advocates of this system bring in reason as a restraining influence, and suppose that it will so regulate the exercise of self-love as to result in the general good. According to this system, if we, in aiming at our own happiness, practice fraud and falsehood with a view to promote it, and find ourselves defeated in the attainment of our object, we may charge our failure, not on the virtuous principle by which it is assumed that we have been moved, but on the failure of our reason to restrain and regulate it so as to attain its end. If it be said, that conscience will not permit us to be happy in the practice of fraud and falsehood, and that self-love, aware of this avoids those practices so inconsistent with our internal peace, it is clearly admitted that conscience is a higher principle of our nature, to the decisions of which our self-love is compelled to yield.

As virtue aims at the general good, it must favor the means necessary for the attainment of this end. Civil government and laws, enacted and executed in wisdom and justice, are highly conducive to the general welfare, and these receive the approbation and support of the virtuous. Were an individual of our race, by a happy exception to the general rule, born with a virtuous bias of the mind, instead of the selfish propensity natural to mankind; and were this virtuous bias fostered and developed in his education, he would be found seeking the good of all. His first benefits conferred, would be on those nearest to him; but his unselfish benevolence would not stop here. As his acquaintance extended into the ramifications of society, his desire and labor for the general good would extend with it, and civil government, wholesome laws, and every institution tending to public benefit, would receive his cordial approbation and support; and every wise and righteous governor, and every subordinate individual, aiming at the public good, would be an object of his favor. If we suppose the knowledge of this individual to increase, and his virtuous principles to expand, widening the exercise of universal benevolence; and if, at length, the idea of a God, a being of every possible moral excellence, the wise and righteous governor of the universe, should be presented; how would his heart be affected? Here his virtuous principles would find occasion for their highest exercise, and would have the highest place in his admiration and love; and the discovery of his universal dominion would produce ineffable joy. Such are the affections of heart which even natural religion teaches, that the knowledge of God's existence and perfections ought to produce.

In God's written Word, we learn our duty in a reverse method. We are not left to trace it out by a slow process, beginning with the first exercise of moral principle in the heart, and rising at length to the infinite God; but the existence and character of God are immediately presented, and the first and chief of all duties is at once announced: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." How sublime! how appropriate! The virtuous mind is open to receive such a revelation; and its perfect accordance with the best teachings of

natural religion, recommends it to our understandings and our hearts. The second commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," is introduced, not as leading to the first, but as subordinate to it. It takes the place which properly belongs to it in a revelation from the supreme authority.

Love has been divided into benevolence, beneficence, and complacence. This division may at first appear inconsistent with the simplicity which has been ascribed to love. Benevolence is the disposition to do good to an object, and beneficence is the conferring of that good. The latter is not properly love, but the effect or manifestation of it. On the other hand, complacence includes the cause of the love together with the affection itself. Love may be exercised toward an unworthy object, as when God loves those who are dead in trespasses and sins. But it may be exercised toward those whose moral character renders them fit objects. In this case, the love being connected with approbation of the character beloved, is called complacence. When love has an inanimate thing for its object, as when Isaac loved savory meat, the term refers to the deriving of enjoyment; but when the object of love is a rational being, the term always implies the conferring of enjoyment even when some pleasure has been received, or some enjoyment in return is expected.

Love to God implies cordial approbation of his moral character. His natural attributes, eternity, immensity, omnipotence, etc, may fill us with admiration; but these are not the proper objects of love. If we worship him in the beauty of holiness, the beauty of his holiness must excite the love of our hearts. As our knowledge of these moral perfections increases, our delight in them must increase; and this delight will stimulate to further study of them; and to a more diligent observation of the various methods in which they are manifested. The display of them, even in the most terrible exhibitions of his justice, will be contemplated with reverent, but approving awe; and their united glory, as seen in the great scheme of redemption by Christ, will be viewed with unmixed and never-ceasing delight.

Love to God includes joy in his happiness. He is not only perfectly holy, but perfectly happy; and it is our duty to rejoice in his happiness. In loving our neighbor, we rejoice in his present happiness, and desire to increase it. We cannot increase the already perfect happiness of God, but we can rejoice in that which he possesses. If we delight in the happiness of God, we shall labor to please him in all things, to do whatever he commands, and to advance all the plans, the accomplishment of which he has so much at heart. Love, therefore, includes obedience to his commands, and resignation and submission to his will.

Love to God will render it a pleasing task to examine the proofs of his existence, and to study those glorious attributes which render him the worthy object of supreme affection. Let us enter on this study, prompted by holy love, and a strong desire that our love may be increased.

## **Chapter I**

### **Existence Of God.**

THERE IS A GOD (Gen 1:1; Psalm 14:1; Mk 12:32; 1Cor 8:6; Heb 3:4).

The doctrine that God exists, is not now to be demonstrated as a new truth. It has been supposed in all the preceding pages; and the proofs of it have been brought to view, in various ways. But, for the sake of systematic arrangement, it will be proper to collect these proofs under one head; and a clearer statement of them will tend to the confirmation of our faith.

1. Our moral nature demonstrates the existence of God.

Our moral nature is adapted to moral government. We find this government within us administered by conscience, and it meets us from without in the influence which we experience from the moral judgments and feelings of others. It restrains our appetites and passions; and, however unwelcome this restraint may be to our wicked propensities, every one knows that it is conducive to his well-being.

We are social as well as moral beings. The circumstances in which we enter the world, and the propensities which we bring with us, unite to render the establishment of society necessary. The birds congregate in flocks, and the bees in swarms, and their instincts are adapted to the social relations which they form. To man in society, moral principles are indispensable. Banish from every member of human society the restraints which his conscience and the moral sense of the community impose on him, and you will desolate the earth or convert it into a Hell. Brute-force and diabolical cunning, under the dominion of lawless passions, will take the mastery of the world, and fill it with wretchedness.

From the combined influence of our moral and social principles, civil governments have originated, and their existence has been found by experience indispensable to the well-being of society. These governments have differed very widely in their degrees of excellence; and some of them have been most unrighteously and cruelly administered; yet the very worst of them has been considered preferable to wild anarchy.

The notion of moral government, and the feeling of its necessity, spring up naturally in the human mind; but no earthly form of it satisfies our desires, or meets our necessities. Conscience restrains us; and, when we have disregarded its monitions, stings us with remorse; but men are still wicked. Public sentiment stamps vice with infamy; but, in spite of public sentiment, men are wicked. Civil government holds out its penalties, and the ruler brandishes his sword; but men persevere in wickedness, and often with impunity.

The voice of nature within us calls for a government free from these imperfections. If, from the idea of a petty ruler over a single tribe or nation, we ascend to that of a moral governor over all intelligent creatures; if instead of the imperfect moral judgments and feelings which we find in men, we attribute to this universal ruler, all possible moral perfections, if we invest him with knowledge sufficient to detect every crime, and power sufficient to manifest his disapprobation of it in the most suitable and effectual way; and if this exalted sovereign, instead of being far from us, is brought into such a relation to us, that in him we live, move, and have our being; we shall have the most sublime conception of moral government, of which our minds are capable. This conception is presented in the proposition, THERE IS A GOD. The idea of God's existence, as the moral ruler of the universe, accords precisely with the tendencies and demands of our moral nature; and, without admitting it, our moral faculties and the phenomena which they exhibit, are totally inexplicable.

The moral principles of our nature find occasion for development and exercise, in the relations which we sustain to our fellow-creatures. But, for their full development and exercise nothing furnishes opportunity, but the relation which we bear to God, and his universal dominion. This exercise of them constitutes religion. Religion is, therefore, the perfection of morality; and the fundamental doctrine of religion is the existence of God.

2. The existence of the world and the contrivances which it contains, demonstrates the existence of God.

While our moral nature leads us to the conception of God, as the moral governor of the universe, and to the belief of his existence, our intellectual nature approaches him, as the Great First Cause. Reason traces the chain of cause and effect throughout its links. It finds every link dependent on that which precedes it; and it asks on what does the entire chain depend? It obtains no satisfactory answer to this question, until it has admitted the existence of an eternal, self-

existent, and independent being, as the first cause of all things. Here, and here only, the mind finds repose.

The argument which has been most relied on in natural religion, to prove the existence of God, is derived from the indications of contrivance, with which Nature abounds. The adaptation of means to ends, and the accomplishment of purposes by contrivances of consummate skill, are everywhere visible. Contrivance implies a contriver. The intelligence displayed is often found in creatures that have no intelligence; and in other cases, when found in intelligent creatures, it is manifestly not from themselves; because it exists without their knowledge, and operates without their control. The contrivance must be referred to an intelligent First Cause. This argument for the existence of God, is of great practical value, because it is presented to our minds daily, and hourly, in all the works of Nature. We meet it in the sun-beams, which impart to plants and animals, the warmth necessary to life; and to every eye, the light without which eyes would be useless. It presents itself in the eyes of every man, beast, bird, fish, insect, and reptile, and is most convincingly exhibited in the arrangements for receiving and refracting the light, and employing it for the purposes of vision; a contrivance as truly mechanical, and conformed to the laws of optics, as that which is seen in the structure of the telescope. We behold it in the descending shower which fertilizes the earth, and causes the grass to grow; and in the bursting germ, the spreading blade, the rising stalk, and the ripening grain, in all which a skillful contrivance is displayed, that infinitely transcends all human art. We discover it in the instincts by which the parent hen hatches her eggs, and takes care of her young; and in the adaptation of every species of animals on land, in air, or in water, to their mode and condition of life. It is seen in the return of day and night, the revolution of the seasons, the wind that sweeps the sky, and the vapor that rises from the ocean, and floats through the atmosphere. We find it in the bones of the body, fitted for their respective motions, and in the muscles which move them; in the throbbing heart, the circulating blood, the digesting stomach, and the heaving lungs. In everything which the

eye beholds, or the mind contemplates, we discover the manifestations of the Creator's wisdom and power. The devotional heart is struck with the evidence of God's existence, so abundantly displayed in all his handiworks, and is incited to admire and adore. The whole universe becomes a grand temple, pervaded with the presence and glory of the deity; and every place becomes an altar, on which may be offered to him the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

### 3. The doctrine that there is a God, is confirmed by the common consent of mankind.

There have been tribes of men without literature, and, to a great extent, without science and arts; but the notion of an invisible, overruling power, with some form of religious worship, has been nearly, or quite universal. In this particular, man is distinguished from all other animals that inhabit the globe; and if there has been any portion of our race in whom no idea of God and religion has appeared, it may be said of them, that they have so far brutalized themselves, as to hide from view the characteristic distinction of human nature. Now, however it may be accounted for, that a belief in the existence of God has prevailed so generally among mankind; the fact of its prevalence is an argument for the truth of the opinion. If it is an ancient revelation handed down by tradition, that revelation proceeded from God, and therefore proves his existence; and if it springs up naturally in the human mind, in the circumstances in which we are placed, what Nature universally teaches, may be received as true.

### 4. Divine revelation dispels all doubt as to the existence of God.

In the Bible, the existence of God is from the very first assumed. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1) The doctrine, though formally declared in scarcely a single passage, is represented as fundamental in religion. "He who comes to God, must believe that he is;" (Heb 11:6) and the denial of it is attributed to folly; "the fool has said in his heart, there is no God." (Ps 14:1) The

volume of revelation is a light emanating from the Father of lights, and is, of itself, an independent proof of his existence. As we study its pages, in his light we shall see light; and a more realizing and abiding conviction that he, the great Source of light, exists, will occupy our minds.

The perfect harmony between natural and revealed religion, with respect to this doctrine, confirms the teaching of both. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge." (Ps 19:1, 2) While Heaven and earth, day and night, speak for God, he speaks for himself in his inspired word, confirming the testimony which they give, and completing the instruction which they convey. Revelation never contradicts or sets aside the teachings of natural religion. God affirms, that "the invisible things of him are from the creation of the world clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; even his eternal power and Godhead." (Rom 1:20) It is no derogation from the authority or perfection of the Scriptures, that we study natural religion. The Scriptures themselves direct us to this study. "Ask the beasts, and they shall teach you, and the birds of the air, and they shall tell you." (Job 12:7) The same God who speaks to us in his word, speaks to us also in this works; and in whatever manner he speaks, we should hear, and receive instruction.

It is a lamentable proof of human depravity, that men should deny or disregard the existence of God. We read of the fool who says in his heart, there is no God; of nations that forget God; and of individuals who have not God in all their thoughts. Such persons do not delight in God; and therefore they say, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of your ways." Of such atheism, the only effectual cure is a new heart. For the occasional suggestion of atheistic doubts, with which a pious man may be harassed, the remedy is, a diligent study of God's word and works, a careful marking of his hand in Providence, and a prayerful and confiding acknowledgment of him in all our ways. If we habitually walk with God, we shall not doubt his existence.

The invisibility of God is one of the obstacles to the exercise of lively faith in his existence. It may assist in removing this obstacle, to reflect that the human mind is also invisible; and yet we never doubt that it exists. We hear the words, and see the actions of a fellow-man, and these indicate to us the character and state of his mind, so as to excite in us admiration or contempt, love or hatred. If, while we listen to his words, and observe his actions, we clearly perceive the intelligence from which these words and actions proceed, why can we not, with equal clearness, perceive the intelligence from which the movements of nature proceed? If we can know, admire, and love, an unseen human mind, it is equally possible to know, admire, and love an unseen God.

## **Chapter II**

### **Attributes Of God.**

As we acquire knowledge of other beings, and of the relations which they hold to us, opportunity is given for the development of our moral principles, and the exercise of our moral feelings. It accords with the dictates of individual conscience, and with the moral judgments common to mankind, and with the teachings of God's word, that the feelings which we exercise, and the actions which we perform towards others, should have regard to their characters and their relations to us. To understand our duty towards God, we must know his character. It is not enough to believe that he exists, but we should labor to acquire a knowledge of him. Let us, then, reverently inquire, Who is the Lord?

#### **I. – Unity.**

**THERE IS BUT ONE GOD** (Dt 6:4; Psalm 86:10; Mk 12:29, 32; In 17:3; Gal 3:20; Eph 4:6; 1Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19).

The heathen nations have worshiped many gods; but the inspired volume throughout inculcates the doctrine, that there is but one God. Moses said, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord;" (Dt 6:4) and, in the New Testament, the same truth is taught: "There is one God, and one Mediator;" (1Tim 2:5) "To us there is but one God." (1Cor 8:6)

It is not clear that the unity of God can be proved by natural religion. In some of the reasonings which have been relied on, the thing to be proved is assumed. The most satisfactory argument is derived from the uniformity of counsel, which appears in the works of creation and providence. The same laws of Nature prevail everywhere; so that, in passing from one region to another, we never feel that we have entered the dominion of another Lord. Light which emanates from the remote fixed stars, possesses the same properties, and obeys the same laws, as that which comes from the sun of our own system.

The proof from revelation is clear and decisive. It is true, that plural names of the deity are frequently used in the Old Testament; but it is manifest that they were not designed to teach the doctrine of polytheism. In Deuteronomy vi. 4, the word "God" is plural, in the original Hebrew; but the whole passage contains the most unequivocal declaration of the unity of God. In Genesis i.1, the name "God" is plural, but the verb "created" is singular, and therefore bars out all inference in favor of polytheism. In several passages, plural pronouns are used when God speaks of himself. "Let us make man;" (Gen 1:26) "Let us go down;" (Gen 11:7) "The man is become as one of us;" (Gen 3:22) these passages, and especially the last of them, cannot well be reconciled with the doctrine of God's unity, so abundantly taught elsewhere, without supposing a reference to the doctrine of the trinity, which will be considered hereafter.

The unity of God renders his moral government one, uniting the subjects of it into one great empire. It leaves us in no doubt to whom our allegiance is due; and it fixes one center in the universe to which the affections of all hearts should be directed. It tends to unite the

people of God: as we have "one God," so we have "one body, and one spirit." (Eph 4:4, 4:6)

## II. – Spirituality.

GOD IS A SPIRIT (Jn 4:24; Isa 31:3; Heb 12:9).

By our external senses we obtain knowledge of properties which belong to a class of substances called matter; such as extension, solidity or impenetrability, divisibility, figure, color.

By consciousness, we have knowledge of our own thoughts and feelings; and there we ascribe to a substance, called mind, which is capable of perceiving, remembering, comparing, judging, reasoning, and willing. The distinction between these two classes of substances is recognized in the judgments of all men. We never attribute thought to fire, air, earth, or water; and we never conceive of mind as round or square, black or white. The properties which we discover in our own minds, we attribute to the minds of others; and we readily conceive the existence of these properties in beings of a different order. The term spirit is used to denote an immaterial and intelligent substance, or being; one which is without the peculiar properties of matter, and possesses properties analogous to those of the human mind. In this sense, God is a spirit. He is not extended, solid and divisible, like a rock, a tree, or a human body; but thinks and wills, in a manner free from all imperfection.

The texts of Scripture which directly teach the spirituality of God, are few. It may be inferred from Isaiah 31:3: "The Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit." The foundation of the parallelism, in this passage, is that God is a spirit. It may be inferred, also, from, the language of Scripture, in which God is called the Father of spirits: "We have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb 12:9) A father and his children possess a common nature, and, as the fathers

of our flesh, are flesh, so, the Father of our spirits, is spirit. There is one passage which teaches the doctrine expressly, "God is a spirit;" (In 4:24) and this would be sufficient to prove it, if it were taught nowhere else.

It is no objection to the doctrine of God's spirituality, that bodily parts, as hands, feet, eyes, &c., are ascribed to him. These are manifestly mere accommodations of language, because we have no words more suitable to express the operations of the divine mind. If it were inadmissible to speak of God's eyes, because he has not material organs of vision, as we have, it would also be inadmissible to speak of God's seeing, because he does not see by means of material light, as we do; or to speak of God's thinking, because his thoughts are not as our thoughts.

The practical use of this doctrine is taught by Christ: "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (In 4:24). In offering him homage, it is not sufficient to come before him with a bended knee, or a prostrate body; but our minds, our spiritual nature, must render the homage, or it will be unacceptable to him.

The spirituality of God is the foundation of the second commandment in the decalogue: "You shall not make unto you any graven image, or the likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them." (Ex 20:4, 5). The reason assigned for this commandment is, that the Israelites saw no form when God manifested his presence to them at Mount Sinai (Dt 4:12-18). He appeared to them in cloud and fire. A pillar of cloud and fire went before the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness, as a token of the divine presence. This token appeared at the tabernacle; and afterwards in the temple built and dedicated by Solomon. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. We are not to understand from these things, that God is either cloud or fire. These are material, and not spiritual substances. As what is purely spiritual

cannot be perceived by our bodily senses, God was pleased to employ these material symbols to give a sensible demonstration of this presence.

For the same reason, he sometimes presented himself in human form. In all these material manifestations of himself, which are recorded in the Old Testament, there is reason to believe that it was the second person in the Godhead, who thus exhibited himself; the same that afterwards appeared in human flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. He is called the Angel of the Lord, the Angel of the Lord's presence, and yet he is called Jehovah; and the reverence due to Jehovah is claimed for him. A created angel is not entitled to this name, or this honor; but they both belong to the Son of God, the Angel of the Covenant, who, after his incarnation, was God manifest in the flesh. This opinion is confirmed by the teachings of the New Testament: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." (In 1:18) Of the Father, Jesus says, "You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape;" (In 5:37) and he said to his disciples, "He who has seen me, has seen the Father." (In 14:9). A comparison of these passages may satisfy us, that all the manifestations of the deity to human senses, whether visible or audible, were made in the person of the Son, or Word of God.

The spirituality of God contradicts the pantheistic notion that the universe is God. The universe is not spirit. In its material fabric, intelligence is displayed; but this intelligence does not belong to the material fabric itself, for matter cannot think or know. To present our religious devotions to the universe, is an idolatry not less degrading than that of the most stupid of the heathen nations. They worship stocks and stones; but this philosophy clothes every clod of earth with divinity, and entitles it to our worship. The heathen render divine honors to a few men, whom, for extraordinary merit they enroll among the gods; but this notion directs our worship to every man, and to every beast of the field. It is a notion perfectly adapted to crush the outflowings of the devotional heart, as they rise

to the one, indivisible, spiritual intelligence, to whom alone divine worship is due.

The notion, that God is the Soul of the universe, may not be liable to precisely the same objection. But what does the proposition mean? The only sense in which we can possibly understand that God is the Soul of the universe, is, that he sustains a relation to the universe analogous to that which the human soul sustains to the body with which it is connected. But how extensive is this analogy? The soul did not create the matter of which the body is made; did not form the skillfully wrought parts of the wonderful machinery, or contrive their mysterious movements, which it studies with admiration, and comprehends only in very small part. The soul exercises but a very limited control over the body. The muscles of voluntary motion are under its command, and move at its will; and, in this fact, we may discover a faint analogy to the operation of Him, who works all things after the counsel of His will, and in whom every creature lives, moves, and has its being.

An analogy so meager as this is not sufficient to justify the metaphorical language in which the proposition is stated. Yet, while we reject the proposition, we may derive from it a profitable suggestion. In our fellowship with the myriads of mankind, we perceive and acknowledge, in the movements of every human limb, in the changes of every human countenance, and in the words which fall from every human tongue, the power and intelligence of an operating human soul. Equally obvious, and infinitely more extensive, is the control which God exercises, at every moment, over every part of the universe. With a proper view of God's spirituality, and of his operative control over the world and everything in it, our minds would hold fellowship with his mind, as direct and undoubted as that which we hold with the minds of our fellow-men, and one more constant, and more elevating and delightful.

### **III. – Immensity, Omnipresence.**

## GOD IS EVERYWHERE (1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 139:7; Jer 23:23).

Every material thing in the universe is somewhere. The sun has its place; the earth also, and every grain of sand, and every drop of water. The drops of water may change their place perpetually, but every drop has, for each moment, its own place, to the exclusion of all other matter in the universe.

In our conceptions of the human mind we assign place to it also, though in a different manner. We do not attribute to it length, breadth, and thickness, as to a block of marble, which can be measured by feet and inches; but we conceive of it as present in the human body, with which it is connected, and absent from another, with which it is not connected. Each mind is operated on by impressions made on the organs of sense which belong to its own body; and operates by its volitions on the muscles of motion which belong to that body. In this view, we conceive of each mind as present in its own body, and not elsewhere; and we conceive of changing the place of the mind, while its connection with the body continues, only by a change in the place of the body.

When we conceive of finite spiritual beings as angels, we assign to each some place; because his operation, though not confined like that of the human mind, to a particular material body, is nevertheless limited. Such conception accords with the teaching of Scripture, in which angels are represented as moving from place to place, to execute the will of their Sovereign. So the angel came to Daniel (Dan 9:23), and to Peter (Acts 12:7); and so one is represented as flying through the midst of Heaven (Rev 14:6).

We must not conceive of God's omnipresence as if it were material. We say that the atmosphere is present at every part of the earth's surface; but this is not strictly true. It is not the whole, but merely a small part of the atmosphere, which is present at each place; God is indivisible. We cannot say, that a part of his essence is here, and a part yonder. If this were the mode of God's omnipresence in

universal space, he would be infinitely divided and only an infinitely small part of him would be present at each place. It would not be the whole deity, that takes cognizance of our actions, and listens to our petitions. This notion is unfavorable to piety, and opposed to the true sense of Scripture: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." (Prov 15:3) "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." (1 Peter 3:12)

There are passages of Scripture which speak of God's removing from one place to another; of his approaching and departing; of his dwelling in Heaven, and of his coming near to his people, and taking up his abode with them. These are manifestly accommodations of language; just as when eyes or hands are attributed to him. They refer to the manifestations of his presence in his various works, and dispensations, in which such changes take place, as are appropriately and impressively expressed by this language.

When we deny a material omnipresence of God, as if his essence were divided and diffused; and when we maintain that the whole deity is everywhere present by his energy and operation, it is not to be understood that we deny the essential omnipresence of God. In whatever manner his essence is present anywhere, it is present everywhere. What the mode of that presence is, we know not. We know not the essence of the human mind, nor the mode of its presence in the body; much less can we comprehend the essence of the infinite God, or the mode of his omnipresence. To that incomprehensible property of his nature, by which he is capable of being wholly present at the same moment, with every one of his creatures, without division of his essence, and without removal from place to place, the name immensity has been given. The essence of God is immense or unmeasured, because it is unmeasurable. It is unmeasurable, because it is spiritual, and therefore, without such dimensions as may be measured by feet and inches; and because, in whatever sense dimensions may be ascribed to it, these dimensions are boundless. Time has a dimension not to be measured by feet and

inches: and we may say of time, that it is omnipresent. The same moment exists in Europe and America, at Saturn, and the center of the earth. The omnipresence of time does not explain the omnipresence of God, but it may help us to admit the possibility of omnipresence without division of essence, or removal of place. But the omnipresence of time is not immensity; for time has its measure, and a moment is not eternity.

It is not derogatory to the dignity and glory of God, that he is present everywhere. There are foul places where human beings would prefer not to be; but they do not affect the Deity as they affect men. The sun-beams fall on them without being polluted; and the holy God cannot be contaminated by them. There are scenes of wickedness from which a good man will turn away with abhorrence, and, in the figurative language of Scripture, God is "of purer eyes than to behold evil:" (Hab 1:13) yet, in another place of scripture, language no less figurative teaches us that the eyes of God behold the evil as well as the good (Prov 15:3). He witnesses, while he abhors.

A man who sincerely believes the omnipresence of God, cannot be indifferent to religion. To realize that the moral Governor of the universe is ever near, in all his holiness and power, and as much present as if he were nowhere else, must awaken solicitude. When a sense of guilt oppresses, the presence of such companion becomes intolerable. The guilty man strives to flee from the presence of God, as Jonah did; but the doctrine of God's omnipresence teaches him that the attempt is unavailing. The power conscience tormenting the guilty man, wherever he goes, is terrible; but the presence of the God against whom he has sinned, and whose wrath he dreads, is still more terrible. To the soul, reconciled to God, the doctrine is full of consolation. In every place, in every condition, to have with us an almighty friend, a kind father, is a source of unspeakable comfort and joy. We need not fear, though we pass through fire or flood, if God be with us. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, we may fear no evil. In every circumstance and trial, it conduces to holiness, to know that God is present.

#### **IV. – Eternity And Immutability.**

GOD IS ETERNAL (Dt 32:40; Dt 33:27; Psalm 9:7; Psalm 90:2; Psalm 102:27; Psalm 146:10; Isa 57:15; Isa 63:16; Jer 10:10; Lam 5:19; 1Tim 1:17).

In our knowledge of the objects which surround us, we include not only their present state, but their continued existence, and the changes which they undergo. Some things pass before our eyes, as visions of the moment; others, as the rocks, the sun, the stars, outlast many generations of men. Few living creatures remain in life as long as man; but the shortness of his life is a subject of daily remark, and of impressive scriptural representation (1Chr 29:15; Job 7:6; Job 9:25, 26). The duration of the deity is exhibited in contrast thus: "Lord, make me know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, you have made my days as a handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing BEFORE YOU." (Ps 39:4, 5) A thousand years, include many of the ordinary generations of mankind; yet, in comparison with God's duration, they are said to be "as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." (Ps 90:4) Tomorrow, while future, may appear to our view, as a duration of considerable length; but yesterday, when it is past, how short it is! An hour of the day, filled with a great variety of incidents, which it might require many hours to narrate, is lengthened out in our view; but how short, how contracted is a watch of the night, in which we sleep and awake, and know not that time has passed! Such to the view of God is the long period of a thousand years. To heighten our conception of God's eternity, it is contrasted with the duration of those natural things which appear to possess the greatest stability: "You, Lord, in the beginning, has laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they shall perish, but you remain; and they all shall wax old as does a garment: and as a vesture shall you fold them up, and they shall be changed; but you are the same, and your years shall not fail." (Heb 1:10-12) But when we have enlarged our conceptions to the utmost, they still utterly fail to comprehend the vast subject. We stretch our thoughts backward

and forward; but no beginning or end of God's existence appears. To relieve our overstretched imagination, and to stop the unavailing effort to comprehend what is incomprehensible, we bring in the negative idea--no beginning, no end. Duration without beginning and without end, becomes the expression of God's eternity.

That everything, except God, had a beginning, is a doctrine of revelation: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1) This doctrine, philosophy cannot contradict, and perhaps cannot fully demonstrate. But there are manifestations of design, even in unorganized matter, in the kinds and quantities that exist, and the uses to which they are adapted. If matter is eternal, or a production of chance, why is it not all of one kind; and why are the kinds of it, and the proportionate quantities of each, so apparently the result of design? Revelation answers this by declaration, "In wisdom you have made them all." (Ps 104:24)

In contemplating God as the First Cause, we consider his existence uncaused. As we look back through duration past, until we find one existence that is without beginning, so we look back through the long chain of effect and cause, until we have found one existence that is without cause. Sometimes, however, the conception is clothed in language, that has not merely negative import. Not satisfied with the merely negative idea, without cause, learned men labor to assign a cause for God's existence, and represent it as the cause of itself, or as including its cause within itself. They express this, by saying, that God is self-existent. This mode of expression accommodates our tendency to philosophize; but it perhaps conveys no other intelligible idea, than that God's existence is without cause.

Another philosophical expression, God necessarily exists, seems to possess some deep meaning; but when we labor to explore its depths, we shall, perhaps, find in it no other intelligible idea, than that God exists, and has always existed. His existence has always rendered his non-existence impossible, because it is impossible for anything to be, and not to be, at the same time. If philosophy goes behind the

existence of God, in search of a cause necessitating his being, she wanders out of her proper province. We may permit her to trace the relation of cause and effect, as far as that relation is to be found; but when she has arrived at the uncaused existence of the eternal One, we should say to her, thus far shall you go, and no further.

The eternity of God has been defined, existence without beginning, without end, and without succession. Time with us, is past, present and future; but God's existence is believed to be a perpetual now. The subject is beyond our comprehension; but it is most reasonable to conclude, that God's mode of existence differs from ours, as it respects time, as well as space; and that, as he exists equally at every point of space, without division of his immensity, so he equally exists at every moment of time, without division of his eternity. Possibly this may be intimated in the Scripture phrase, "inhabits eternity." (Isa 57:15) We dwell in time, a habitation with its various apartments; and we pass from one to another in order; but God's habitation is undivided eternity. Our lifetime has its parts, childhood, boyhood, manhood, and old age; but God's life is as indivisible as his essence.

## **GOD IS UNCHANGEABLE**

(Num 23:19; Psalm 102:27; Mal 3:6; Heb 1:12; Heb 13:8; Jas 1:17).

The doctrine of God's eternity, and that of his unchangeableness, are nearly allied to each other; and if his eternity excludes succession, it must also exclude the possibility of change. Unchangeableness applies not only to his essence, but also to his attributes. His spirituality is ever the same, his omnipresence the same, and so of the rest. His purpose, also, is unchangeable; it is called "his eternal purpose." (Eph 3:11) He says: "My counsel shall stand." (Isa 46:10) He is said, in Scripture, to repent; but, in the same chapter (1Sam 15) in which it is twice said that God repented, it is also stated: "He is not a man, that he should repent." We cannot suppose that the sacred writer intended to contradict himself palpably in the compass of a

few verses. In accommodation to our modes of speaking, God is said to repent when he effects such a change in his work as would, in human actions, proceed from repentance. Repentance, in men, implies grief of mind, and change of work. The former is inconsistent with the perfection of God, but the latter is not. To destroy the world by the deluge, no more implied a change in God than to create it at first. Each set effected a great change, but in both God remained unchanged. No other language could so impressively represent God's abhorrence of man's wickedness to be the cause of the deluge, as that used by the sacred historian: "It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." (Gen 6:6)

When we contemplate the shortness of human life, and the incessant change of everything with which we have to do on earth, and of ourselves, as we pass from the cradle to the grave, we may well exclaim, as we look up to the eternal and unchangeable God, "Lord, what is man, that you are mindful of him." A sense of our comparative nothingness is eminently conducive to humility. A view of God's eternity and unchangeableness is necessary to the due exercise of confidence in him. It is folly to trust in uncertain riches, and in the things which perish in the using of them; but we wisely put our trust in the living God. The men with whom we converse are passing away; the condition of life is perpetually changing; we are, in all our relations to earthly things, as if we were on the surface of a restless ocean; but God is as a rock amidst the fluctuating waters; and, while we repose unshaken confidence in him, our feet stand firmly, and we can look without dismay on the troubled scene around us. Men of age receive our reverence, and the counsels of their long experience are highly prized. Who will not reverence the Ancient of Days, the eternal God; and who will reject the counsel of Him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting?" (Mic 5:2)

The immutability of God has been made a pretext for restraining prayer before him; but this is wrong. Even if the giving or withholding of the blessings desired were unaffected by the prayer, there still remains sufficient reason for perseverance in offering the

petition. The devotional feeling is acceptable to God, and profitable to the soul. If prayer will not bring God to the soul, it will at least, bring the soul to God. A man in a boat, on a dangerous water, may be saved by means of a rope thrown to him from the shore. When he pulls, though the rock to which the other end of the rope may be fastened does not come to the boat, the boat comes to the rock. So prayer brings the soul to God.

But it is not true, that the giving or withholding of the blessing desired is unaffected by the petition presented. Though God is unchangeable, his operation changes in its effect on his creatures, according to their changing character and circumstances. The same sun hardens clay and softens wax. Adam was in God's favor before he sinned; but afterwards was under his displeasure. When a man becomes converted, he is removed from under the wrath of God into a state of favor with him, and all things now work together for his good. In all this, God changes not. God has, in time past, bestowed blessings in answer to prayer, and his unchangeableness encourages the hope that he will do so in time to come. His whole plan has been so arranged, in his infinite wisdom, that many of his blessings are bestowed only in answer to prayer. The connection between the prayer and the bestowment of the blessing, is as fixed by the divine appointment as that between cause and effect in natural things. The unchangeableness of God, therefore, instead of being a reason for restraining prayer, renders prayer indispensable; for our weak petitions have their effect with God, according to his immutable purpose; and, to deny the possibility of this, would be to deny the efficacy of Christ's intercession.

## V. – Omniscience.

GOD KNOWS ALL THINGS (Job 37:16; Psalm 147:5; Isa 42:9; Isa 46:9, 10; Acts 1:24; Rom 11:33; Heb 4:13; 1Jn 3:20).

In their stupidity, men have worshiped gods of wood and stone, which having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not; but the deity

that the Bible makes known, is a God of knowledge (1Sam 2:3). Even natural religion teaches that the maker and governor of the world must possess intelligence; and the degrading idolatry which worshiped birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things, was contrary to reason, as well as to revelation.

The MODE of God's knowledge we cannot comprehend. Scripture and reason unite in teaching that his thoughts are not as our thoughts. We derive our best conception of his knowledge from our own mental operations; but we ought to be careful not to think of him as altogether such an one as ourselves. As he differs from all creatures, in mode of presence and of duration, so he differs, in mode of knowledge, from all other intelligent beings.

God does not acquire knowledge after our mode. We acquire knowledge of external objects by means of our bodily senses; but God has no body, and no organs of sense like ours. We learn the less obvious relations of things by processes of reasoning, which are often tedious and laborious, but God has no labor to acquire knowledge, and suffers no delay in attaining it. All things are naked, and open to his eyes (Heb 4:13). We learn much by the testimony of others; but God is not dependent for knowledge on information received from any of his creatures. We obtain knowledge of our own mental operations by means of consciousness; and, as this is without any process of reasoning, and not by our bodily senses, or the testimony of others, it may give us the best possible conception of God's mode of knowledge. All things which he knows are before his mind as immediately and completely as the states and operations of our minds are before our consciousness; but our best conceptions fall infinitely short of the incomprehensible subject. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:9).

God does not hold his knowledge in possession, after our mode. The great store-house of our knowledge is memory, a wonderful faculty, with which the human mind is endowed. Without it, all knowledge

would pass from the mind, as the image passes from a mirror, when the object producing it has gone by. But if God's duration is without succession, there is, with him, no past to remember; and therefore memory, with him is something wholly different from what it is with us. His whole mode of life differs so widely from ours, that we cannot attribute human faculties to him, without degrading his divinity.

In our study of God's attributes, it is important to remember, at every step of our progress, that they are all incomprehensible to us. We should do this, not only for the sake of humility, but to guard us against erroneous inferences, which we are liable to draw from our imperfect conceptions of the divine nature. It is instructive to notice how far the elements of these conceptions are derived from what we know of our own minds. No combination of such elements can possibly give us adequate conceptions of the eternal and infinite Mind. Even the Holy Scriptures, which reveal God to us, do not supply the elementary conceptions necessary to a perfect knowledge of God. They speak to human beings in human language, and the knowledge which they impart is sufficient for our present necessities, and able to make us wise to salvation; but we should remember, that human language cannot express to us what the human mind cannot conceive, and, therefore, cannot convey a full knowledge of the deity.

Much of human knowledge consists of mere negations. Frequent exemplifications of this occur in our study of the divine attributes. What God's spirituality is, we cannot positively know; but we know that it is not matter. What God's eternity is, we cannot comprehend but, in our labor to comprehend it, we stretch our positive conception of duration to the utmost possible extent, and at length seek relief in the negative ideas--without beginning, without end, without succession. These negations mark the imperfection of our knowledge. God's knowledge is direct and positive, and he seeks no relief in the negations that we find so convenient.

God does not use his knowledge after our mode. For the proper directing of actions, knowledge is necessary, both of things actually

existing, and of things, the existence of which is merely possible. Our minds possess both these kinds of knowledge to a limited extent, and use them in an imperfect manner. In the study of history and geography we acquire knowledge of things which are, or have been, in actual existence. Arithmetic treats of number, and geometry of magnitude; but these sciences do not teach the actual existence of anything. By reasoning from the abstract relations and properties of things, our minds are capable of determining what would, or might exist, in supposed cases; and, by this process, our knowledge extends into the department of things possible. This knowledge is necessary to choice; and, therefore, to voluntary action. If but one thing were possible, there would be no room for choice; and we must know the things possible, before we can choose. God has perfect knowledge of things possible, and these depend on his power. He has, also, perfect knowledge of things actual, and these depend on his will. He knew how many worlds he could create, and how many kinds of plants and animals; and out of these he chose what worlds, plants, and animals, should exist. According to our mode of conception, the knowledge of things possible precedes the will or purpose of God, and the knowledge of things actual follows it. But we dare not affirm that there is any succession of thought in the divine mind. How God uses his knowledge, in counsel, or in action, we cannot comprehend.

The EXTENT of God's knowledge is unlimited. He knows all things; all things possible, and all things actual. He knows himself perfectly, though unknown by any other being. The attributes which we labor in vain to comprehend, he understands fully. His ways, to us unsearchable, are fully known to him from the beginning of his works. All creatures are known to him, and everything that appertains to them: the angels of Heaven, the men who inhabit the earth, and every living thing, even to the sparrow, or young ravens, he knows, and carefully regards. The thoughts of the mind he understands, and the secrets of every heart he fully searches.

All events, past, present, or future, are known to God. Past events are said to be remembered by him; and he claims the foreknowledge of

future events, challenging false gods to a comparison with him in this respect (Isa 41:22). His foreknowledge of future events is proved by the numerous predictions contained in the Bible that have proceeded from him. It was given to the Israelites (Dt 18:22), as a rule for distinguishing a true prophet of the Lord, that his predictions should be fulfilled; but a foreknowledge of future events could not be imparted to them from the Lord, if the Lord himself did not possess it.

The mode of God's foreknowledge we cannot comprehend. He sees present things not as man sees, and remembers the past not in the manner of human memory. It is, therefore, not surprising that we cannot comprehend the mode of his knowledge; and especially of his foreknowledge, in which we least of all, resemble him. We have some knowledge of the present and the past; but of the future we have no absolute knowledge. We know causes at present existing, from which we infer that future events will take place; but an absolute foreknowledge of these future events we do not possess. Some cause, of which we are now not aware, may intervene, and disappoint our expectation. The phenomena of nature, which we expect with the greatest confidence, such as the rising of the sun, the occurrence of an eclipse, are foreknown only on the condition that the present laws of nature shall continue to operate, without change or suspension. But the Author of Nature may interpose, and change the present order of things. On the supposition that God has a perfect knowledge of all the causes now operating; that there are fixed laws which determine the succession of events; and that God perfectly understands these laws; we may comprehend that God can infallibly predict things to come. No being but himself can interfere with the order of things which he has established. This mode of foreknowledge we can, in some measure, conceive; but the supposition which it involves, that all events take place according to an established order of sequence, many are unwilling to admit. They maintain that events dependent on the volitions of free agents, do not so occur; and, therefore, cannot be foreknown after this manner.

Some, who adopt the view last mentioned, deny that God foreknows future events, dependent on human volitions. They nevertheless attribute omniscience to him, and understand it to be the power of knowing all things. They say that, as omnipotence signifies a power to do all things, without the doing of them, so omniscience signifies the power to know all things, without knowing of them.. There is clearly a mistake here in language. As omnipotence signifies all power, so omniscience signifies all knowledge; and God does not possess omniscience, if he possesses merely the power to know, without the knowledge itself. But it may be questioned, whether, according to the theory, God has even the power to know. The power of God might have excluded such contingencies from existence; but, after having opened the door, it is difficult to understand how any power could foreknow, what things will enter, if they are in their nature unforeknowable. But the strongest possible objection lies against the theory, in that it is opposed to fact. God has predicted very many events dependent on innumerable volitions of free agents, and, therefore, must have foreknown them. Those who have advocated this theory, in connection with the opinion, that the duration of God is an eternal now, and that there is strictly speaking, neither foreknowledge nor after-knowledge with him; fix narrow limits to the divine omniscience. If God's knowledge is unchangeable, and if he has no foreknowledge of contingencies, he can have no after-knowledge of them. But the whole history of mankind is dependent on contingencies; being filled with them, and events depending on them. All this must be a blank to the view of God. Men may know this history, and it may be written out in ten thousand volumes; but God knows it not, for, though he possesses the power to know, he has determined not to exercise it. How then shall God judge the world?

Human beings have two modes of knowing past events; one, by memory; the other, by inferring their existence from the effects which have followed. One man remembers that a house was burned down, having seen the flames of its combustion; another knows that it was burned down, because he sees its ashes. In one mode, memory

runs back along the line of time; in the other, reason runs back along the line of cause and effect. The only mode which we have of knowing future events, is by the reasoning process. Whether God has a method, analogous rather to our memory or perception, than to our reason; it is impossible for us to determine. If he has, we cannot conceive of it, because there is nothing like it in ourselves; but the absence of such a power in us, by no means proves its non-existence in God. Some have imagined that God looks down the vista of time, and sees future events, as we see a traveler approaching when he is yet at a distance from us. But the cases are not analogous. We see the traveler coming, not having come; what is present, as to time, and not what is future. His arrival, the future event, we know only by a process of reasoning. The supposition is that God has an immediate perception of the future event, without any intervening process of reasoning. To say that he sees it, expresses this figuratively, but does not explain it.

The doctrine that there is no succession in the eternity of God, neither denies nor explains his foreknowledge. 1. It does not deny. Some have maintained that there is, strictly speaking, neither foreknowledge nor after-knowledge with God; and this may be admitted, if foreknowledge necessarily implies succession of thought. But the foreknowledge which we attribute to God, is not knowledge antecedent to something else in the divine mind, but knowledge antecedent to the event foreknown. From God's knowledge predictions of future events have proceeded. Such knowledge, in a human mind, would be foreknowledge; and in human language this is its proper name. 2. It does not explain. The doctrine teaches that all times and events, past, present, and future, are alike present to God. The overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus, and the prediction thereof by Isaiah, are both historical events; and, as such, are supposed to have been alike present to the mind of God from the beginning of the world. Now, the fact that the overthrow was present to the mind of God, could not be the cause of the revelation made to the prophet, and of the prediction which followed; for according to the doctrine, the prediction was already as much present to the mind of God as the

event predicted; and therefore, its existence must be as much presupposed in the order of cause and effect. Hence, to account for this, or any other prediction, we are compelled to admit that God has a mode of foreknowledge, into the nature of which the doctrine of the perpetual now gives us no insight.

But why should we indulge ourselves in vain speculations, or exhaust ourselves with needless efforts? We are like children who wade into the ocean, to learn its depth by the measure of their little stature, and who exclaim, almost at their first step, O! how deep! Even Paul, when laboring to fathom this subject exclaimed, "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)

In comparison with God's infinite intelligence, how little is all human knowledge! We honor Newton, and other giants of intellect that have appeared in the progress of our race; but their highest glory was, to know a very little of God's ways. Let every power of our minds bend before his infinite understanding, with deep humility and devout adoration. We study our own minds, and find in them much that we cannot explain; and when we use the little knowledge of them to which we can attain, in our labored efforts to understand something of God, an important part of its use consists in convincing us that we cannot find out God, and that his thoughts are not as our thoughts.

As intelligent beings, we may contemplate the omniscience of God with devout admiration; and as guilty beings, we should fear and tremble before it. He sees the inmost recesses of the heart. The hateful thoughts which we are unwilling a fellow-worm should know, are all known to him, and every thought, word, and deed, he remembers, and will bring into judgment. How terrible is this attribute of the Great Judge, who will expose the secrets of every heart, and reward every man according to his works, though unobserved or forgotten by men!

But with all the awe which invests it, this attribute of the Divine Nature, is delightful to the pious man. He rejoices to say, You, God, see me. He prays, Try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me into the way everlasting. Gladly he commits himself to the guidance of him who has all knowledge. Conscious of his own blindness and darkness, he knows not which way to take, or what is best for him; but he puts himself, with unwavering confidence, into the hands of the omniscient God.

## VI. – Omnipotence.

GOD IS ABLE TO DO WHATEVER HE PLEASES (Gen 17:1; Job 5:9; Jer 32:17; Mt 19:26; Rev 1:8; Rev 19:6).

Our first idea of power, is probably derived from the control which we possess over our muscles, and the use which we make of them, to produce effects on things about us. Our limbs and voice become the instruments of our power; and, in the using of them for effecting our purpose, the notion of power arises. We transfer this notion, and incorporate it into the conception which we form of other intelligent beings like ourselves; and it thus becomes an element in our conception of the deity. In the material world, causes are followed by their effects in a manner similar to that in which effects are produced by the motion of our limbs; and the material causes are said to have power. It is thus we speak of the power of steam, or of an engine.

We know well that our power is limited. Many things which we attempt we fail to accomplish. To conceive of omnipotence, we introduce, as in other cases, the negative idea, without fail. This however, does not exclude the idea of attempt, desire, or will. It derogates nothing from the omnipotence of God, that he does not accomplish what he has no desire or will to accomplish. It is impossible for God to lie, or to deny himself; but these are things which he does not please to do, because they are inconsistent with his moral perfections. Nor would the doing of these things be any indication of supreme power. It is also true, that God cannot do

things which imply contradiction in themselves; as, to make a thing to be, and not to be, at the same time; to make a circle to be at the same time a square, etc. If finite power fails to accomplish such things, it fails not because it is finite, but because the things are impossible. No measure of power could come nearer to success. Impotence is as good as omnipotence for accomplishing impossibilities.

We are filled with awe in contemplating the omnipotence of God. When we hear the voice of his thunder in the heavens, or feel the earth quake under the tread of his foot, how do solemn thoughts of things divine fill our minds! From the rending cloud, and the quaking earth, let us look back to the power which brought creation into being, and forward to that display of his power which we are to witness on the last day. Such a being, who will not fear? Our minds exercise their power through our bodies, to which, therefore, the immediate exercise of it is limited; for we cannot add one cubit to our stature, or make one hair white or black. But God has everything in the universe under his immediate and perfect control. He needs no instruments, no mechanical aid, no series of contrivances; but, at his will the thing is done, whether it be the production of an animalcule, or the creation of a world. At our will, a finger moves; but at the volition of God, a planet is launched in its orbit, with a force of which the cannon-ball gives but a very faint conception. Hurricanes, which sweep the earth, and lift up the dwellings, and the very bodies of men, in the air, have their power. The ocean, which sports with mighty ships, has its power. The volcano, which bursts forth with such awful grandeur, has its power. But when we have combined the force of air, ocean, and subterranean fire, we must multiply it by the number of such agencies which are operating, through all the worlds in the whole of God's vast empire, before we can begin to conceive adequately of his omnipotence. Lo, these are parts of his ways; but the thunder of his power, who can understand? (Job 26:14)

## VII. – Goodness.

GOD IS INFINITELY BENEVOLENT (Ex 34:6; Psalm 103:2-8; Zech 9:17; Mt 7:11; Lk 2:14; Lk 12:32; Rom 5:8; 1Jn 4:8).

God's goodness, as exercised towards his creatures, is often expressed in the Scriptures by the term love. Love is distinguished as benevolence, beneficence, or complacence. Benevolence is love in intention or disposition; beneficence is love in action, or conferring its benefits; and complacence is the approbation of good actions or dispositions. Goodness, exercised toward the unworthy, is called grace; toward the suffering, it is called pity, or mercy. The latter term intimates that the suffering, or liability to suffer, arises from the just displeasure of God.

Goodness implies a disposition to produce happiness. We are conscious of pleasure and pain in ourselves, and we know that we can, to some extent, cause pleasure or pain in others. Continued pleasure is happiness; continued pain, misery. God is able to produce happiness or misery, when, and to whatever extent he pleases. Which of these is it the disposition of his infinite nature to produce?

God's goodness may be argued from the manifestations of it in the works of creation. The world is peopled with rational beings, capable of pleasure; and sources of pleasure are everywhere provided for them. Every sense of every animal is an inlet of pleasure; and for every sense the means of pleasure are provided. What God gives them they gather. His open hand pours enjoyments into their existence at every moment. When we consider the innumerable living creatures that are, at this moment, receiving pleasure from the abundant and varied stores which his creating power has furnished; and when we reflect, that this stream of bounty has flowed incessantly from the creation of the world, we may well consider the fountain from which it has descended as infinite.

It demonstrates the goodness of God, that the pleasures which his creatures enjoy do not come incidentally, but are manifestly the result of contrivance. Food would nourish without the pleasure

experienced in eating. We might have been so constituted as to be driven to take it by hunger, and to receive it with pain, but little less than that produced by the want of it. But God has superadded pleasure where it was not absolutely necessary, and has made the very support of animal existence a source of perpetual gratification.

It adds greatly to the force of this argument, that indications of malevolent design are not found in the works of God. Pain is, indeed, often experienced, but it never appears to result from an arrangement specially made for receiving it. There is no organ of our body to which we can point, and say, this was specially designed to give us pain.

Mere animal enjoyment is not the highest that God bestows. To his intelligent creatures he has opened another source in the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. We need knowledge, as well as food; and we might be driven to seek it by a painful necessity, without deriving any pleasure from it. But here, again, the benevolence of the Creator is manifested. Pleasure is superadded when we acquire necessary knowledge; and, when the progress has reached the limit of our necessities, the pleasure does not cease. The intellectual appetite is never satiated to loathing.

But God has made us susceptible of far higher and nobler pleasure in the exercise of virtue and religion. To this he has adapted our moral nature, rendering us capable both of the exercise and the enjoyment. For the exercise of virtue and religion, the constitution of human society, and the various relations which we sustain in its organization, furnish abundant occasion; and in the moral sense of mankind, and the approbation which virtue extorts, even when the tribute is not spontaneously rendered, a source of enjoyment is opened. In the proper exercise of our moral powers, we are capable of loving and enjoying God; and, therefore, of experiencing a happiness that infinitely transcends all other enjoyment. This ocean of infinite fullness, this source of eternal and exhaustless happiness, gives the full demonstration of God's infinite goodness. And this

enjoyment, also, never cloys; but, with the progress, the delight increases.

The doctrine of God's goodness, notwithstanding the abundance of its proofs, is attended with difficulties. Though rational beings are not furnished with organs purposely prepared for the receiving of pain, they have organs for inflicting it, which are unquestionably the result of contrivance. The fangs of serpents, and the stings of insects, are instances of this kind; and to these may be added the talons and tusks, or beaks, with which carnivorous animals rend their prey. How is the existence of such pain-inflicting contrivances to be reconciled with the infinite goodness of God? How can we explain, in harmony with this doctrine, the suffering which animals endure from the violence of each other, from hunger, cold, and disease? Above all, how can we reconcile the innumerable miseries with which human society is filled, in every rank and condition of life? If God is infinitely good, why is human life begun in pain, and closed in pain, and subject to pain throughout its whole course?

These difficulties are of too much magnitude to be overlooked. They perplex the understanding, and disquiet the heart; and, therefore demand a careful and candid consideration. The following observations are offered, to guard the heart against their influence.

1. Admit the existence of the difficulties in their full force, and what then? Does it follow that God is a malevolent being? Were he so, the proofs of his malevolence would abound, as those of his goodness now do. We should everywhere find animal senses adapted to be the inlets of misery, and the objects of these senses all adapted to give pain. Does it follow that God is indifferent whether his creatures are happy or miserable? The numerous provisions which are made with a manifest reference to animal enjoyment, forbid this supposition. Does it follow that God is capricious? This conclusion is precluded by the fact, that what suffering there is in the world, runs throughout along with its enjoyments; the happiness and the misery are entwined with each other, and form parts of the same system. By

summing up the whole, we discover that animal life has more enjoyment than suffering, and that its pains are, in most cases, incidental. In our daily experience, blessings are poured upon us incessantly; and when suffering comes, we are often conscious that it arises from our abuse of God's goodness, and is, therefore, no argument against it. In many other cases, we find present suffering conducive to future good; and we have reason to believe that it would always be so, if we endured it with a proper spirit, and made a wise improvement of it. It becomes us, therefore, when sufferings occur, the beneficial tendency of which we cannot discover, to remember that we comprehend but a very small part of God's way. We have found every other attribute of his nature incomprehensible to us, and it ought not to surprise us that his goodness is so.

The sufferings which we experience in ourselves, or see in others, become an occasion for the trial of our faith. To the understanding of a child, the discipline of his father may appear neither wise nor kind. Indulgences which are craved may be denied; and toils and privations, exceedingly unwelcome, may be imposed. In these circumstances, it is the child's duty to confide where it cannot comprehend. So we should exercise faith in the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Father, and believe that his ways are full of goodness, even when they are inscrutable. Enough of his goodness is seen elsewhere to satisfy us of its existence when mystery hides it from view.

2. It cannot be proved that an admixture of pain with the large measure of enjoyment which God bestows on his creatures, is inconsistent with his goodness. The insect of a day, and the immortal near the throne of God, derive their enjoyment from the same infinite goodness. If the short-lived insect should pass its few hours in the sunbeams without pain, and should be annihilated without pain, the difficulty which now embarrasses us would not apply to its case. Its existence, filled with enjoyment, would correspond with our notions of the Creator's goodness; and the finiteness, or very small measure of its enjoyment, would not disprove the source to be

infinite from which it proceeds. Now, if a creature of another kind should have enjoyments a hundred fold greater, with an abatement of one measure of pain, its existence, on the whole, is ninety-nine times more desirable than that of the insect. Shall we, then, deny that this existence proceeds from the goodness of the deity? If the pain forms a part of the same system with the pleasure, we must attribute them to the same author; and the animal that has ninety-nine measures of enjoyment remaining, has no more right to complain of the abatement of one by the endurance of pain, than the insect supposed would have to complain of the absence of ninety-nine measures which the more favored creature enjoys. This consideration may satisfy us that the presence of some pain, connected with a far greater amount of enjoyment, is not inconsistent with the doctrine that God is infinitely good.

Furthermore, it is perfectly conceivable that pain itself may, in some cases, enhance our pleasures, as relief from suffering renders subsequent enjoyment more exquisite: and, in other ways, which we are unable to comprehend, pain may produce a beneficial result. In this view, the existence of pain cannot be inconsistent with the goodness of God.

3. Much of the suffering in the world is clearly the effect of sin, and is to be considered an infliction of divine justice. The justice of God claims scope for its exercise, as well as his goodness. The goodness of God is infinite, if it confers happiness as widely as is consistent with the other perfections of his nature. It is a favorite theory with some, that God aims at the greatest possible amount of happiness in the universe; and that he admits evil, only because the admission of evil produces in the end a greater amount of happiness than its exclusion would have done. According to this theory, justice itself is a modification of benevolence; and the pain suffered by one being, is inflicted from love to the whole. But whether justice be a modification of benevolence, or a distinct attribute, its claims must be regarded; and goodness does not cease to be goodness, because it

does not overthrow the government of God, or oppose his other perfections.

Some persons attribute all the sufferings of brute animals to the sin of man, but the Scriptures do not clearly teach this doctrine; and we have shown that the pain which brutes endure, may be otherwise reconciled with the goodness of God. That animals suffer because of man's sin, is clear in the cruelty which they often experience from human hands; but that all their sufferings proceed from this cause is not so clear. Unless the order of things was greatly changed at the fall of man, hawks had their claws and beaks from the day they were created, and used them before man sinned, in taking and devouring other birds for food; and, therefore, pain and death, in brute animals, did not enter the world by the sin of man. Brute animals have, on the whole, a happy existence. Free from anxiety, remorse, and the fear of death, they enjoy, with high relish, the pleasures which their Creator has given them; and it is not the less a gift of his infinite goodness, because it is limited in quantity, or abated by some mixture of pain.

4. It may be, that God's goodness is not mere love of happiness. In his view, happiness, may not be the only good, or even the chief good. He is himself perfectly happy; yet this perfection of his nature is not presented to us, in his word, as the only ground, or even the chief ground, on which his claim to divine honor and worship rests. The hosts of Heaven ascribe holiness to him, and worship him because of it; but not because of his happiness. If we could contemplate him as supremely happy, but deriving his happiness from cruelty, falsehood, and injustice, we should need a different nature from that with which he has endowed us, and a different Bible to direct us from that which he has given, before we could render him sincere and heart-felt adoration. In the regulation of our conduct, when pleasure and duty conflict with each other, we are required to choose the latter; and this is often made the test of our obedience. On the same principle, if a whole life of duty and a whole life of enjoyment were set before us, that we might choose between them, we should be required to prefer holiness to happiness. It

therefore accords with the judgment of God not to regard happiness as the chief good; and the production of the greatest possible amount of happiness could not have been his prime object in the creation of the world. We may conclude that his goodness is not a weak fondness which indulges his creatures, and administers to their enjoyment, regardless of their conduct and moral character. It aims at their happiness, but in subordination to a higher and nobler purpose. According to the order of things which he has established, it is rendered impossible for an unholy being to be happy, and this order accords with the goodness of God, which aims, not at the mere happiness of his universe, but at its well-being, in the best possible sense.

If these views are correct, the miseries which sin has introduced into the world, instead of disproving the goodness of God, proceed from it, and demonstrate it. They are means used by the great Father of all, in the discipline of his great family, to deter from the greatest of all evils. Precisely this use the wisdom from above teaches us to make of his judgments and threatenings; and when these awful means have taught us the evil of sin, and have been blessed to us as means of sanctification, we may perceive in them a manifestation of God's goodness.

5. To infer the infinitude of God's goodness from its effects, we must view them in the aggregate. The perfection of his justice appears in its minute and precise adaptation to each particular case. Every part of his administration must, when brought to the line of rectitude for comparison, be found to agree with it precisely. But as in estimating the length of a line, we do not examine its parts, so the infinitude of God's goodness must be judged from the aggregate of its effects, as we learn the power of God, not from a single grain of sand, but from the whole extent of creation.

To comprehend this vast subject, we need the infinite mind of God himself. In events which now appear to us dark and mysterious, the seeds of future benefits to his creatures may be wrapped up, which

will bring forth their fruit hereafter, for the use of admiring and adoring intelligences. The parts of the great system are so wonderfully adjusted to each other, that no finite being dare say that this is useless, or that pernicious or hurtful. Why God has made precisely such orders of creatures as inhabit the world with us, and why he has appointed to them their various modes of life, with the advantages and inconveniences peculiar to each, we are wholly unable to say; and, if we undertake to say why he has made any creatures at all, we may assign a reason which we think we understand, but of which, in reality, we know but little. If the united intelligence of the universe could lift up its voice to God, as the voice of one creature, and say, "Why have you made me thus?" it would be daring impiety. How unfitting then for man, who is a worm, to arraign the wisdom and goodness of his Maker!

The goodness of God is the attribute of his nature, which, above all others, draws forth the affection of our hearts. We are filled with awe at his eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence; but we can imagine all these attributes connected with moral qualities which would render them repulsive. But the goodness of God, while it is awful and grand, is at the same time powerfully attractive. It is this, when understood in its proper sense, not as the mere love of happiness, that renders Jehovah the proper center of the moral universe. It is this that attracts the hearts of all holy intelligences now in Heaven, and that is drawing to that high and holy place whatever on earth is most lovely and excellent; and if the hearts of any repel this center, and recede further from it, they are "wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."

## VIII. – Truth.

GOD IS A BEING OF INVIOABLE TRUTH (Dt 32:4; Psalm 119:142; In 8:26; Rom 3:4; Ti 1:2; Heb 6:18; Rev 3:7).

The truth of God includes veracity and faithfulness: veracity in his declaration of things as they are, and faithfulness in the exact

fulfillment of his promises and threatenings. Men often err in their testimony from mistake of facts, and fail through inability to fulfill promises which they have made with honest intentions. The omniscience of God renders mistake with him impossible; and his omnipotence and unchangeableness render the fulfillment of his intentions certain. Truth, as a moral attribute, is the agreement of what is spoken with the mind of the speaker. We never charge men with want of veracity, when they err in their testimony through mere mistake; or with want of faithfulness, when they fail to fulfill their promises entirely from inability. God's testimony is true, because it agrees perfectly with his view of things, and that this view agrees with the actual state of things, results, not from his truth, but his omniscience. His promises are true because they agree precisely with his intentions; and that these intentions are exactly fulfilled, results from other attributes, as has been explained. Truth is understood for the most part to refer to something spoken or written; but the truth of God may be understood, in a wider sense, to denote the agreement of all the revelations or manifestations which he has made of himself, with his mind and character.

Because God's manifestations of himself are true, it does not follow that they are complete and perfect. He showed his glory to Moses; but it was only a part of his glory that he exhibited, because Moses was unable to bear the full display. All manifestations to his creatures are necessarily limited; and they are made as seems good in his sight. Our knowledge of God, which is necessarily imperfect because of our weakness, is often erroneous, through our misuse of the manifestations which he has made. So the heathen world, when they knew God, glorified him not as God, but changed the truth of God into a lie.

When men abuse the knowledge of God which they possess, and the means of knowledge which he has afforded them, it is not inconsistent with his character to give them up, in righteous judgment, to their own hearts' lusts. Because they receive not the love of the truth, God shall send them strong delusions (2

Thessalonians 2:11), that they should believe a lie. So Ahab desired a false prophecy, and his prophets desired to gratify him, and God gave him up to be deceived (1 Kings 22). This is expressed, in the prophetic imagery of Scripture, by his sending a lying spirit into the prophets. Ahab was deceived; but it was in spite of the true word of God, by the prophet whom he rejected. Jeremiah complains that God had deceived him; but this, in the most unfavorable construction that can be put on his language, amounts to nothing more than an impatient exclamation of the prophet, under a severe trial.

We can have no knowledge of God, except by the manifestations he has made of himself. When we receive these, however made, as expressing to us the mind and character of God, we exercise faith in God. But when we close our understandings and hearts against these manifestations, or, through disrelish of them, misinterpret them in any manner, we are guilty of the great sin of unbelief, which rejects the testimony of God, and makes him a liar.

## **IX. – Justice.**

GOD IS PERFECTLY JUST (Job 34:12; Psalm 9:4; Psalm 92:15; Isa 38:17; Rom 2:6).

Justice consists in giving to every one his due. It has been distinguished into Commutative and Distributive. Commutative Justice is fair dealing in the exchange of commodities, and belongs to commerce. Distributive Justice rewards or punishes men according to their actions, and appertains to government. In either view, justice relates to the distribution of happiness, or the means of procuring it, and presupposes a principle or rule to which this distribution should conform, and, according to which, something is due to the parties. Commutative Justice regulates the giving of one means of enjoyment in exchange for another, so as not to disturb the proportion of happiness allotted to each; but Distributive Justice rises higher, and respects the very allotment or distribution of happiness, giving to one, and withholding from another, according to rule. It is in the

latter sense only that justice is attributed to God. It implies the existence of moral government; and it is the attribute which secures a faithful and perfect administration of this government.

Some have admitted another distinction, to which the name Public Justice has been given. This determines the character of God's moral government, and the rules according to which it proceeds. It may be regarded as a question of definition, whether the existence and character of God's moral government shall be ascribed to his justice or his goodness. As this government tends to the greatest good of the universe, there appears to be no reason to deny that it originates in the goodness of God; and if it be ascribed to his Public Justice, that justice may be considered a modification of his goodness.

In the moral government of God, men are regarded as moral and as rational beings, and the amount of their enjoyments is regulated with reference to their moral character. The precise adaptation of this is the province of justice. In the blindness of human depravity, men claim enjoyments as a natural right, irrespective of their moral character and conduct. They reject the moral government of God, and seek happiness in their own way. This is their rebellion, and in this the justice of God opposes them. This is the attribute which fills them with terror, and arrays omnipotence against them. The moral government of God must be overthrown, and the monarch of the universe driven from his high seat of authority, or there is no hope of escape for the sinner. He would gladly rush into the vast storehouse of enjoyments which infinite goodness has provided and claim them as his own, and riot on them at pleasure; but the sword of justice guards the entrance. In opposition to his desires, the government of God is firmly established, and justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne. Even in the present world, the manifestations of this government are everywhere visible; and it is apparent that there is a God, a God of justice, who judges in the earth; but the grand exhibition is reserved for the judgment of the great day. Conscience now, in God's stead, often pronounces sentence, though its voice is unheeded; but the sentence from the

lips of the Supreme Judge cannot be disregarded, and will fix the sinner's final doom.

Although there are hearts so hard as to be unaffected by a sense of God's justice, a right view of this awful and glorious attribute inspires that fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. An abiding assurance that a just God sits on the throne of the universe, is indispensable to the proper exercise of piety.

## **X. – Holiness.**

**GOD IS IMMACULATELY HOLY** (Ex 15:11; Lev 11:44; 1Sam 2:2; Job 4:18; Psalm 5:4, 5; Psalm 22:3; Isa 6:3; Hab 1:13; Mt 5:48; 1Jn 1:5; Rev 4:8).

Goodness, truth and justice, are moral attributes of God. Holiness is not an attribute distinct from these; but a name which includes them all, in view of their opposition to contrary qualities. It implies the perfection of the assemblage;--the absence of everything in it contrary to either of the properties included.

Men are unholy. Even the purest of men have their spots. It is useful to contrast the character of God, in this respect, with that of men. It increases our admiration and love, adds fervor to our devotion, incites to worship him in the beauty of holiness, and to imitate him in our character and lives. "Be you holy, for I am holy."

## **XI. – Wisdom.**

**GOD IS INFINITELY WISE** (Job 4:18; Job 36:5; Psalm 104:24; Prov 21:30; Rom 11:33; 1Cor 1:25; 1Tim 1:17).

Knowledge and wisdom, though often confounded by careless thinkers, are different. Wisdom always has respect to action. Our senses are affected by external objects, and perceptions of them arise in the mind, which constitute a large part of our knowledge. We learn their properties and relations, and this knowledge, laid up in the

memory, becomes a valuable store, from which we may take what may be necessary for use. But it is in using this store that wisdom is exhibited. When impressions from without have stirred the mental machinery within, that machinery, in turn, operates on things without. It is in the out-goings of the mind that wisdom has place, and is concerned in forming our plans and purposes of action. Our knowledge and moral principles have much influence in directing our conduct, and that man is considered wise, whose knowledge and moral principles direct his conduct well. Wisdom is therefore regarded as consisting in the selection of the best end of action, and the adoption of the best means for the accomplishment of this end.

God is infinitely wise, because he selects the best possible end of action. What the end is which Jehovah has in view in all his works, we cannot claim to comprehend. The scriptures speak of the glory of God as the end of creation and redemption, and we seem authorized to speak of this as the end of all his works; but what is the full import of the phrase, "the glory of God?" We suppose it to signify such a manifestation of his perfections, and especially of his moral perfections, as is supremely pleasing to himself, and therefore to all intelligent beings who are like-minded with him. But we are lost in the contemplation.

God is infinitely wise, because he adopts the best possible means for the accomplishment of the end which he has in view. In creation his wisdom made them all (Ps 104:24); and in redemption he has abounded toward us in all wisdom (Ephesians 1:8). He works all things after the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11); and he is wise in counsel.

The wisdom of God is an unfathomable deep. His way is in the sea, and his path in the mighty waters. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! (Rom 11:33) A child cannot comprehend the plans of a sage statesman; much less can the wisest of men comprehend the plans of the only wise God. We should ever

bear this in mind when we undertake to inquire into the reasons of the divine procedure.

The question, why God permitted the entrance of sin into the world, has baffled the wisdom of the wise. As a being of perfect holiness, he hates sin with a perfect hatred. Having infinite power to exclude it from his dominions, why did he permit its entrance? As the benevolent Father of his great family, why did he permit so ruinous an evil to invade it? Was there some oversight in his plan, some failure in the wisdom of his arrangements, that rendered this direful disaster possible? As our faith is often perplexed with these questions, such observations as the following may be of use to assist its weakness.

1. Sin is in the world; and God is infinitely good and wise. The first of these propositions expresses a fact of which we have daily proof, before our eyes and in our hearts; the second is an indubitable truth of natural and revealed religion. Though we may be unable to reconcile these propositions, they are both worthy to be received with unwavering faith. No man, in his right mind, can doubt either of them.

2. The existence of sin is not to be ascribed to weakness in God. He could easily have barred it out of his dominions. He might have declined to make moral agents, and have filled the world with creatures possessing no moral faculties, and therefore incapable of sinning. Or, for anything that appears to the contrary, it was in his power to create moral agents, and so confirm them in holiness from the first, as to render their fall impossible. Or, on the very first appearance of sin in any one of his creatures, he might have at once annihilated the transgressor, and have prevented the evil from spreading, to the ruin of his subjects, or even remaining in his dominions. If we can, for a moment, entertain doubt on this point, his perfect control of the evil, now that it has obtained entrance into his dominion, is sufficient to confirm our faith. It has indeed entered. And the prince of the power of the air is combined with his numerous

legions, to give it prevalence and triumph. But, to destroy the works of the devil, the son of God appeared in human nature. He chose the weakness of that nature for the display of his power, in crushing the head of the old serpent. Hence Christ is the power of God. In his deepest humiliation, in the hour while hanging on the cross, he triumphed over his foe, and gave proof of his triumphant power, by plucking the thief, who expired near him, from the very jaws of destruction. The cross exhibits the brightest display of omnipotence.

3. The existence of sin is not inconsistent with the justice of God. It is the province of justice to punish the sinner, but not to annihilate his sin. Justice, in the wide sense in which it is called Public Justice, and coincides with Goodness, will be considered, in its relation to this subject, in the next observation; but, in its ordinary sense, it supposes the existence of moral government, and moral agents, and, therefore, the possibility of transgression. Laws are made with reference to the lawless and disobedient; and the civil ruler would be armed with the sword in vain, if there could be no evil-doers to whom he might be a terror. Justice does not prevent the entrance of sin, but finds in it an occasion for its highest exercise. This attribute is displayed awfully and gloriously in the punishment of offenders. On seeing the destruction of Antichrist, and the smoke of his torment ascending up forever and ever, the inhabitants of Heaven are represented as saying: "Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigns." (Rev 19:6) It is in the exercise of his punitive justice that they understand his government, and wherefore he is seated on the throne. Justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

4. The existence of sin is not inconsistent with the goodness of God. Even those who explain goodness to be the love of happiness for its own sake, and understand utility, or the production of happiness, to be the foundation of virtue, do not conclude that God's goodness must necessarily exclude moral evil from the world. On the contrary, they suppose that he will overrule the evil so as ultimately to produce a larger amount of happiness in the universe, than would have existed had moral evil never entered. If this be taken as a mere

hypothesis, until it be disproved, it will be sufficient to answer objections; and the hypothesis cannot be disproved by a mind incapable of comprehending the infinite subject. If God's goodness aims at the well-being of the universe, rather than at its happiness, another hypothesis, impossible to be disproved, may be made, that God overrules the existence of sin so as to produce most important moral benefits. What these may be, we cannot be expected to understand; but of one benefit, at least, we can form a conjecture. As God's moral perfections are the glory of his character, so his moral government is the glory of his universal scheme; and it may, therefore, have been pleasing to his infinite mind to permit the entrance of sin, because it gave occasion for the display of his justice and moral government. It may accord best with his infinite wisdom, to confirm his obedient subjects in holiness, not by physical necessity, but by moral influence; and the display of his justice and moral government must be a most important means for the accomplishment of this end. How could the intelligences that are to expand forever in the presence of this throne, have those moral impressions which are necessary to the perfection of their holiness, if they should forever remain ignorant of his justice, and hatred of sin? In contemplating this subject, it is important to keep in view, that God's goodness is to be estimated by its aggregate effect. As including the love of happiness, it provides enjoyments for his creatures: in this life, innumerable and ever present, though not infinite, or unmixed; and in the life to come, what eye has not seen, or ear heard, or the heart of man conceived. This mass of enjoyment he has not thrown before his creatures, that each may secure to himself what he can; but infinite justice guards the distribution of it. The rule of distribution is that which Public Justice, or God's goodness, considered as the love of well-being, has prescribed in the establishment of his moral government. Infinite goodness secures the greatest possible good from his universal administration, while perfect justice regulates all the details of the administration, in beautiful harmony with the grand design.

5. Although to do evil that good may come is reprobated in God's word, yet to permit evil, which he overrules for good, accords with his method of procedure. It is said: "The wrath of man shall praise you, and the remainder of wrath you shall restrain." (Ps 76:10) In this it is clearly implied that a portion of the wrath is unrestrained, or permitted, and is overruled for good. Paul asks, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?" (Rom 9:22) Endurance and long-suffering is the permission of the continuance of the evil; and the display of God's justice and power thereby, is manifestly supposed in the Apostle's question. The crucifixion of Christ, a deed perpetrated by wicked hands, was permitted by God. He was even delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. This event has been overruled to good inconceivably great. Why may we not suppose that it accorded with infinite wisdom to permit the entrance of sin, with a view to the glorious scheme of redemption by the blood of Christ? Christ crucified is the wisdom of God. In his cross, the power, goodness, justice, and wisdom of God, are harmoniously and gloriously displayed. While we glory in the cross of Christ, we do not forget that the enemies of the cross are to perish. Mournful as the fact is, our hearts will fully approve the sentence which will be executed upon them when we shall hear it pronounced by the lips of the righteous judge. Such was the benevolence of Paul's heart, that he was willing to lay down his life for the salvation of souls; yet so overpowering was his sense of Christ's claim to the love of every human heart, that he did not hesitate to exclaim: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. Maranatha." (1Cor 16:22) If it accorded with his love of souls to pronounce this imprecation, it will accord with the benevolence of God to punish the enemies of Christ with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. If our minds now fail fully to approve the awful sentence, it is because we inadequately conceive the glory and loveliness of Christ.

It should fill us with joy, that infinite wisdom guides the affairs of the world. Many of its events are shrouded in darkness and mystery, and inextricable confusion sometimes seems to reign. Often wickedness prevails, and God seems to have forgotten the creatures that he has made. Our own path through life is dark and devious, and beset with difficulties and dangers. How full of consolation is the doctrine, that infinite wisdom directs every event, brings order out of confusion, and light out of darkness, and, to those who love God, causes all things, whatever be their present aspect and apparent tendency, to work together for good.

## **Conclusion.**

The doctrine concerning God harmonizes with the affections of the pious heart, and tends to cherish them. The moral nature of those who do not love God, demonstrates his existence and their obligation to love him and consequently, their nature is at war with itself. There is a conflict within, between conscience and the depraved affections. The moral principle is in the unrenewed heart, overrun with unholy passions; and it cannot be duly developed, until the affections are sanctified. When, by this change, harmony has been produced in the inner man, all that is within will harmonize with the doctrine concerning God. The mind, in its proper and healthy action, joyfully receives the doctrine, and finds in God the object of its highest love. The pious man rejoices that God exists, and that his attributes are what nature and revelation proclaim them to be. "Whom have I in Heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside you." (Ps 73:25)

The doctrine concerning God not only harmonizes with inward piety, but tends to cherish it. If love to God exists when he is but partially known, it will increase as our knowledge of him increases. As the pious man studies the character of God, the beauty and glory of that character open to his view, and his heart is drawn out towards it with

more intense affection. With such soul-ravishing views the Psalmist had been favored, when he exclaimed, " O God, you are my God; early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see your power and your glory, so as I have seen you in the sanctuary." (Ps 63:1, 2)

The love of God, which is increased by a true knowledge of him, is not a mere feeling of gratitude for blessings received. Many persons talk of God's goodness, and profess to love him, who have no pleasure in contemplating his holiness and justice, and to whom these are unwelcome attributes. When such persons stand before him in the last judgment, there is reason to fear that they will find him to be a different God from that which they loved and praised on earth. Love to the true God is love to the God of holiness and justice, the God in whom every moral perfection is united; and if our love is of this kind, we shall delight to survey the glories of the divine character, and, apart from all views of the benefits received from him, shall be enamored of his essential loveliness.

The love to God which increases by a true knowledge of him, is pervaded with a deep-felt reverence for his character. The familiar levity with which he is sometimes approached and addressed, by no means comports with the awful exhibitions of himself which he has made in his works and in his word. They who, while they profess to love him, have no solemn sense of his infinite grandeur and holiness, have yet to learn the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom. The true knowledge of God will rectify this evil in the heart.

The true love of God is accompanied with humility. When we are absorbed in the contemplation of the human mind, we may well be filled with admiration of its powers and capacities. But lately, it rose into being, from the darkness of nonentity, a spark so feebly glimmering, that an omniscient eye only could perceive its light. In the short period which has intervened, it has gradually increased in splendor, and has probably astonished the world by its brilliance. What was once the feeblest ray of intellect, has become a Newton, a

Locke, a Howard, or a Napoleon. And when we conceive of this immortal mind, as continuing to expand its powers throughout a boundless future, we are ready to form a high estimate of human greatness. But when we remember that man, whatever he is, and whatever he is capable of, is a creature formed by the hand of God, and endowed by him with all these noble faculties; when we consider that, with all his advancement through eternal ages, he will forever be as nothing, compared with the infinitude of God; and when we look back into past eternity, and contemplate God as existing with all this boundlessness of perfection, ages of ages before our feeble existence commenced; we may well turn away from all admiration of human greatness, and exclaim, "Lord, what is man, that you are mindful of him?"

But the strongest incentive to humility is found in contrasting our depravity with God's holiness. Noble as the human intellect is, it is ruined by its apostasy from God. Every depraved son of Adam, who has studied the attributes of God, and has attained to some knowledge of his immaculate holiness, may well exclaim in deep humility, "Woe is me! A man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (Isa 6:5)

The true knowledge of God gives confidence in him. In view of his truth, we learn to put unwavering trust in the manifestations of himself which he has made, and the promises which he has given, for the foundation of our hope. There are times when the good man loses his sensible enjoyment of the divine favor, and when the sword of justice appears pointed at his breast; but even then, with the true knowledge and love of God in his heart, he can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

The doctrine concerning God which the Bible teaches, confirms its claim to be regarded as the word of God.

This doctrine, as we have seen, is precisely adapted to man's moral nature, and calls forth the moral and religious principles with which

his Creator has endowed him, into their best and noblest exercise. If viewed apart from his relation to God, man, the creature so wonderfully endowed, is an enigma in the universe; but the doctrine concerning God solves the mystery. The tendency of this doctrine to exert a sanctifying influence, at the very origin of all human feeling and action, demonstrates that it comes from God. He who experiences its sanctifying power on his heart, has a proof of its truth that noting else can give. For this doctrine, we are chiefly indebted to the Bible. Here God, who has dimly exhibited himself in his works, comes forth in a direct communication, and like the sun in the heavens, makes himself visible by his own light. If the religious principle within us acted as it ought, the doctrine of the Bible would be as precisely adapted to us as the light of the sun is to the eye; and we should have as thorough conviction that the God of the Bible exists, as we have that the sun exists, when we see him shining forth with all his splendor in the mid-heavens.

The proof that the Bible is the word of God, will accumulate as we make progress in our investigation of religious truth. We have advanced one step, by our inquiries into the existence and attributes of God; and the glory of the Bible-doctrine concerning God, has shone on our path with dazzling brightness. Let us continue to prosecute our studies, guided by this holy book; and if we open our hearts to the sanctifying power of its truth, we shall have increasing proof, in its influence on our souls, that it comes from the God of holiness.

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