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PRETORIA NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH



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THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

PART 2

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1. The Lovingkindness of God

We Propose To Engage The Reader with another of His excellencies—of which every Christian receives innumerable proofs. We turn to a consideration of God's lovingkindness because our aim is to maintain a due proportion in treating of the divine perfections, for all of us are apt to entertain one-sided views of them. A balance must be preserved here (as everywhere), as it appears in those two statements of the divine attributes, "God is light" (1 John 1:5), "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The sterner, more awe-inspiring aspects of the divine character are offset by the gentler, more winsome ones. It is to our irreparable loss if we dwell exclusively on God's sovereignty and majesty, or His holiness and justice; we need to meditate frequently, though not exclusively, on His goodness and mercy. Nothing short of a full-orbed view of the divine perfections—as revealed in Holy Writ—should satisfy us.

Scripture speaks of "the multitude of his lovingkindnesses," and who is capable of numbering them? (Isa. 63:7). Said the psalmist, "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!" (Ps. 36:7). No pen of man, no tongue of angel, can adequately express it. Familiar as this blessed attribute of God's may be to people, it is something entirely peculiar to divine revelation. None of the ancients ever dreamed of investing his gods with such endearing perfection as this. None of the objects worshipped by present-day heathen possess gentleness and tenderness; very much the reverse is true, as the hideous features of their idols exhibit. Philosophers regard it as a serious reflection upon the honor of the Absolute to ascribe such qualities to it. But the Scriptures have much to say about God's lovingkindness, or His paternal favor to His people, His tender affection toward them.

The first time this divine perfection is mentioned in the Word is in that wondrous manifestation of deity to Moses, when Jehovah proclaimed His "Name," i.e., Himself as made known. "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6), though much more frequently the Hebrew word, *chesed*, is rendered "kindness" and "lovingkindness." In our English Bibles the initial reference, as connected with God, is Psalm 17:7, where David prayed, "Shew thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy fight hand them which put their trust in thee." Marvelous it is that One so infinitely above us, so inconceivably glorious, so ineffably holy, should not only notice such worms of the earth, but also set His heart upon them, give His Son for them, send His Spirit to indwell them, and so bear with all their imperfections and waywardness as never to remove His lovingkindness from them.

Consider some of the evidences and exercises of this Divine attribute unto the saints. "In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself" (Eph. 1:4-5). As the previous verse shows, that love was engaged on their behalf before this world came into existence. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9), which was His amazing provision for us fallen creatures. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3), by the quickening operations of My Spirit, by the invincible power of My grace, by creating in you a deep sense of need, by attracting you by My winsomeness. "I will betroth thee unto me for ever, yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness and in judgment, and in lovingkindness and in mercies" (Hos. 2:19). Having made us willing in the day of His power to give ourselves to Him, the Lord enters into an everlasting marriage contract with us.

This lovingkindness of the Lord is never removed from His children. To our reason it may appear to be so, yet it never is. Since the believer be in Christ, nothing can separate him from the love of God (Rom. 8:39). God has solemnly engaged Himself by covenant, and our sins cannot make it void. God has sworn that if His children keep not His commandments He will "visit their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes." Yet He adds, "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break" (Ps. 89:31-34). Observe the change of number from "their" and "them" to "Him." The lovingkindness of God toward His people is centered in Christ. Because His exercise of lovingkindness is a covenant engagement it is repeatedly linked to His "truth" (Ps. 40:11; 138:2), showing that it proceeds to us by promise. Therefore we should never despair.

"For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isa. 54:10). No, that covenant has been ratified by the blood of its Mediator, by which blood the enmity (occasioned by sin) has been removed and perfect reconciliation effected. God knows the thoughts which He entertains for those embraced in His covenant and who have been reconciled to Him; namely, "thoughts of peace, and not of evil" (Jer. 29:11). Therefore we are assured, "The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me" (Ps. 42:8). What a word that is! Not merely that the Lord will give or bestow, but command His lovingkindness. It is given by decree, bestowed by royal engagement, as He also commands "deliverances" (Ps. 44:4), "the blessing, life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3), which announces that nothing can possibly hinder these bestowments.

What ought our response to be? First, "Be ye therefore followers ("imitators") of God, as dear children; and walk in love" (Eph. 5:1-2). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness" (Col. 3:12). Thus it was with David: "Thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth" (Ps. 26:3). He delighted to ponder it. It refreshed his soul to do so, and it molded his conduct. The more we are occupied with God's goodness, the more careful we will be about our obedience. The constraints of God's love and grace are more powerful to the regenerate than the terrors of His Law. "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings" (Ps. 36:7). Second, a sense of this divine perfection strengthens our faith, and promotes confidence in God.

Third, it should stimulate the spirit of worship. "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee" (Ps. 63:3; cf. 138:2). Fourth, it should be our cordial when depressed. "Let . . . thy merciful kindness (same Hebrew word) be for my comfort" (Ps. 119:76). It was so with Christ in His anguish (Ps. 69:17). Fifth, it should be our plea in prayer, "Quicken me, O LORD, according to thy lovingkindness" (Ps. 119:159). David applied to that divine attribute for new strength and increased vigor. Sixth, we should appeal to it when we have fallen by the wayside. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness" (Ps. 51:1). Deal with me according to the gentlest of Thy attributes, make my case an exemplification of Thy tenderness. Seventh, it should be a petition in our evening devotions. "Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning" (Ps. 143:8). Arouse me with my soul in tune therewith, let my waking thoughts be of Thy goodness.

2. The Goodness of God

The Goodness Of God endureth continually" (Ps. 52:1). The goodness of God respects the perfection of His nature: "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). There is such an absolute perfection in God's nature and being that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it; nothing can be added to it to make it better.

He is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature's good is a superadded quality, in God it is His essence. He is infinitely good; the creature's good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him (Thomas Manton).

God is summurn bonum, the chiefest good.

The original Saxon meaning of our English word God is "The Good." God is not only the greatest of all beings, but the best. All the goodness there is in any creature has been imparted from the Creator, but God's goodness is underived, for it is the essence of His eternal nature. As God is infinite in power from all eternity, before there was any display thereof, or any act of omnipotence put forth; so He was eternally good before there was any communication of His bounty, or any creature to whom it might be imparted or exercised. Thus, the first manifestation of this divine perfection was in giving being to all things. "Thou art good, and doest good" (Ps. 119:68). God has in Himself an infinite and inexhaustible treasure of all blessedness enough to fill all things.

All that emanates from God—His decrees, His creation, His laws, His providences—cannot be otherwise than good: as it is written. "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Thus, the goodness of God is seen, first, in creation. The more closely the creature is studied, the more the beneficence of his Creator becomes apparent. Take the highest of God's earthly creatures, man. Abundant reason he has to say with the Psalmist, "I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well" (Ps. 139:14). Everything about the structure of our bodies attests to the goodness of their Maker. How suited the hands to perform their allotted work! How good of the Lord to appoint sleep to refresh a wearied body! How benevolent His provision to give the eyes lids and brows for their protection! So we might continue indefinitely.

Nor is the goodness of the Creator confined to man, it is exercised toward all His creatures. "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:15-16). Whole volumes might be written, and have been, to amplify this fact. Whether it is the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, or the fish in the sea, abundant provision has been made to supply their every need. God "giveth food to all flesh, for his mercy endureth forever" (Ps. 136:25). Truly, "The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (Ps. 33:5).

The goodness of God is seen in the variety of natural pleasures which He has provided for His creatures. God might have been pleased to satisfy your hunger without the food being pleasing to our palates—how His benevolence appears in the varied flavors He has given to meats, vegetables, and fruits! God has not only given us senses, but also that which gratifies them; this too reveals His goodness. The earth might have been as fertile as it is without being so delightfully variegated. Our physical lives could have been sustained without beautiful flowers to regale our eyes, and exhale sweet perfumes. We might have walked the fields without our ears being saluted by the music of the birds. Whence then, this loveliness, this charm, so freely diffused over the face of nature? Verily, "His tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9).

The goodness of God is seen in that when man transgressed the law of His Creator a dispensation of unmixed wrath did not at once commence. God might well have deprived His fallen creatures of every blessing, every comfort, every pleasure. Instead, He ushered in a regime of a mixed nature, of mercy and judgment. This is very wonderful if it be duly considered; and the more thoroughly that regime is examined the more it will appear that "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2:13). Notwithstanding all the evils which attend our fallen state, the balance of good greatly preponderates. With comparatively rare exceptions, men and women experience a far greater number of days of health than they do of sickness and pain. There is much more creature-happiness than creature-misery in the world. Even our sorrows admit of considerable alleviation, and God has given to the human mind a pliability which adapts itself to circumstances and makes the most of them.

Nor can the benevolence of God be justly called into question because there is suffering and sorrow in the world. If man sins against the goodness of God, if he despises "the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering," and after the hardness and impenitency of his heart treasureth up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath (Rom. 2:5-6), who is to blame but himself? Would God be "good" if He did not punish those who ill-use His blessings, abuse His benevolence, and trample His mercies beneath their feet? It will be no reflection upon God's goodness, but rather the brightest exemplification of it, when He will rid the earth of those who have broken His laws, defied His authority, mocked His messengers, scorned His Son, and persecuted those for whom He died.

The goodness of God appeared most illustriously when He sent forth His Son "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). It was then that a multitude of the heavenly host praised their Maker and said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). Yes, in the Gospel the "grace (Gr., benevolence or goodness) of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). Nor can God's benignity be called into question because He has not made every sinful creature a subject of His redemptive grace. He did not do so with the fallen angels. Had God left all to perish it had been no reflection on His goodness. To any who challenge this statement we remind him of our Lord's sovereign prerogative: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matthew 20:15).

"O that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men" (Ps. 107:8). Gratitude is the return justly required from the objects of His beneficence; yet is it often withheld from our great Benefactor simply because His goodness is so constant and so abundant. It is lightly esteemed because it is exercised toward us in the common course of events. It is not felt because we daily experience it. "Despise thou the riches of his goodness?" (Rom. 2:4). His goodness is despised when it is not improved as a means to lead men to repentance, but, on the contrary, serves to harden them from supposing that God entirely overlooks their sin.

The goodness of God is the life of the believer's trust. It is this excellency in God which most appeals to our hearts. Because His goodness endureth forever, we ought never to be discouraged: "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nah. 1:7).

When others behave badly to us, it should only stir us up the more heartily to give thanks unto the Lord, because He is good; and when we ourselves are conscious that we are far from being good, we should only the more reverently bless Him that He is good. We must never tolerate an instant's unbelief as to the goodness of the Lord: whatever else may be questioned, this is absolutely certain, that Jehovah is good; His dispensations may vary, but His nature is always the same. (C. H. Spurgeon).

3. The Patience of God

Far Less Has Been Written on the patience of God than on the other excellencies of divine character. Not a few of those who have expatiated at length upon the divine attributes have passed over the patience of God without any comment. It is not easy to suggest a reason for this, for surely the longsuffering of God is as much one of the divine perfections as is His wisdom, power, or holiness—as much to be admired and revered by us. True, the actual term will not be found in a concordance so frequently as the others, but the glory of this grace shines on almost every page of Scripture. Certainly we lose much if we do not frequently meditate upon the patience of God and earnestly pray that our hearts and ways may be more completely conformed thereto.

Probably the principal reason why so many writers have failed to give us anything, separately, upon the patience of God is because of the difficulty of distinguishing this attribute from divine goodness and mercy, particularly the latter. God's longsuffering is mentioned in conjunction with His grace and mercy again and again (see Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15). That the patience of God is really a display of His mercy is one way it is frequently manifested. But that they are one and the same excellency, and are not to be separated, we cannot concede. It may not be easy to discriminate between them. Nevertheless, Scripture fully warrants us in predicating some things of the one which we cannot of the other.

Stephen Charnock, the Puritan, defines God's patience, in part:

It is a part of the Divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. God being the greatest goodness, hath the greatest mildness; mildness is always the companion of true goodness, and the greater the goodness, the greater the mildness. Who so holy as Christ, and who so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch of His mercy: "the LORD is full of compassion, slow to anger" (Ps. 145:8). It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the subject: mercy respects the creature as miserable, patience respects the creature as criminal; mercy pities him in his misery, patience bears with the sin which engendered the misery, and giving birth to more.

Personally we define the divine patience as that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forbear so long in punishing them. Nahum 1:3 reads, "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power," upon which Mr. Charnock said:

Men that are great in the world are quick in passion, and are not so ready to forgive an injury, or bear with an offender, as one of a meaner rank. It is a want of power over that man's self that makes him do unbecoming things upon a provocation. A prince that can bridle his passions is a king over himself as well as over his

subjects. God is slow to anger because great in power. He has no less power over Himself than over His creatures.

At the above point, we think, God's patience is most clearly distinguished from His mercy. Though the creature is benefitted, the patience of God chiefly respects Himself, a restraint placed upon His acts by His will; whereas His mercy terminates wholly upon the creature. The patience of God is that excellency which causes Him to sustain great injuries without immediately avenging Himself. Thus the Hebrew word for the divine longsuffering is rendered "slow to anger" in Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 103:8. Not that there are any passions in the divine nature, but God's wisdom and will is pleased to act with a stateliness and sobriety which becomes His exalted majesty.

In support of our definition we point out that it was to this excellency in the divine character that Moses appealed, when Israel sinned so grievously at Kadesh-Barnea, and there provoked Jehovah so sorely. Unto His servant the Lord said, "I will smite them with the pestilence and disinherit them." Then the typical mediator pleaded, "I beseech thee let the power of my LORD be great according as thou hast spoken, saying, The LORD is longsuffering" (Num. 14:17). Thus, His longsuffering, is His power of self-restraint.

Again, in Romans 9:22 we read, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Were God to immediately break these reprobate vessels into pieces, His power of self-control would not so eminently appear; by bearing with their wickedness and forbearing punishment so long, the power of His patience is gloriously demonstrated. True, the wicked interpret His longsuffering quite differently—"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11)—but the anointed eye adores what they abuse.

"The God of patience" (Rom. 15:5) is one of the divine titles. Deity is thus denominated, First, because God is both the author and object of the grace of patience in the creature. Second, because this is what He is in Himself: patience is one of His perfections. Third, as a pattern for us: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Col. 3:12). And again, "Be ye therefore followers [emulators] of God, as dear children" (Eph. 5:1). When tempted to be disgusted at the dullness of another, or to revenge one who has wronged you, remember God's infinite patience with you.

The patience of God is manifested in His dealings with sinners. How strikingly it was displayed toward the antediluvians. When mankind was universally degenerate, and all flesh had corrupted his way, God did not destroy them till He had forewarned them. He "waited" (1 Pet. 3:20) probably no less than one hundred and twenty years (Gen. 6:3), during which time Noah was a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). Later, when the Gentiles not only worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, but also committed the vilest abominations contrary to even the dictates of nature (Rom. 1:19-26), and hereby filled up the measure of their iniquity; yet, instead of drawing His sword to exterminate such rebels, God "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" and gave them "rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons" (Acts 14:16-17).

Marvelously God's patience was exercised and manifested toward Israel. First, He "suffered their manners" for forty years in the wilderness (Acts 13:18). Later, they entered Canaan, but followed the evil customs of the nations around them, and turned to idolatry; though God chastened them sorely, He did not utterly destroy them, but in their distress, raised up deliverers for them. When their iniquity rose to such a height that none but a God of infinite patience could have borne them, He, notwithstanding, spared them many years before He allowed them to be carried into Babylon. Finally, when their rebellion against Him reached its climax by crucifying His Son, He waited forty years before He sent the Romans against them; and that only after they had judged themselves "unworthy of eternal life" (Acts 13:46).

How wondrous God's patience is with the world today. On every side people are sinning with a high hand. The divine law is trampled under foot and God Himself openly despised. It is truly amazing that He does not instantly strike dead those who so brazenly defy Him. Why does He not suddenly cut off the haughty infidel and blatant blasphemer, as He did Ananias and Sapphira? Why does He not cause the earth to open and

devour the persecutors of His people, so that, like Dathan and Abiran, they shall go down alive into the pit? And what of apostate Christendom, where every possible form of sin is now tolerated and practiced under cover of the holy name of Christ? Why does not the righteous wrath of heaven make an end of such abominations? Only one answer is possible: because God bears with "much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction."

What of the writer and the reader? Let us review our own lives. It is not long since we followed a multitude to do evil, had no concern for God's glory, and lived only to gratify self. How patiently He bore with our vile conduct! Now that grace has snatched us as brands from the burning, and given us a place in God's family, and begotten us unto an eternal inheritance in glory; how miserably we requite Him. How shallow our gratitude, how tardy our obedience, how frequent our backslidings! One reason why God suffers the flesh to remain in the believer is that He may exhibit His "longsuffering to us-ward" (2 Pet. 3:9). Since this divine attribute is manifested only in this world, God takes advantage to display it toward "His own."

May your meditation upon this divine excellency soften our hearts, make our consciences tender; and may we learn in the school of experience the "patience of saints," namely, submission to the divine will and continuance in well doing. Let us seek grace to emulate this divine excellency. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). In the immediate context Christ exhorts us to love our enemies, bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us. God bears long with the wicked notwithstanding the multitude of their sin. Shall we desire to be revenged because of a single injury?

4. The Grace of God

This Is A Perfection of the divine character exercised only toward the elect. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the New is the grace of God ever mentioned in connection with mankind generally, still less with the lower orders of creatures. It is distinguished from "mercy," for the mercy of God is "over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). Grace is the lone source from which flows the goodwill, love, and salvation of God unto His chosen people. This attribute of the divine character was defined by Abraham Booth in his helpful book, *The Reign of Grace*, thus: "It is the eternal and absolute free favor of God, manifested in the vouchsafement of spiritual and eternal blessings to the guilty and the unworthy."

Divine grace is the sovereign and saving favor of God exercised in bestowing blessings upon those who have no merit in them and for which no compensation is demanded. Nay, more; it is the favor of God to those who not only have no positive deserts of their own, but also who are thoroughly ill-deserving and hell-deserving. It is completely unmerited and unsought, and is altogether unattracted by anything in or from or by the objects upon which it is bestowed.

Grace cannot be bought, earned, nor won by the creature. If it could be, it would cease to be grace. When a thing is said to be of "grace" we mean that the recipient has no claim upon it, that it was in no wise due him. It comes to him as pure charity, and, at first, unasked and undesired.

The fullest exposition of the amazing grace of God is found in the epistles of Paul. In his writings "grace" stands in direct opposition to works and worthiness, all works and worthiness, of whatever kind or degree. This is abundantly clear from Romans 11:6, "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. If it be of works, then is it no more grace, otherwise work is no more work." Grace and works will no more unite than acid and alkali. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). The absolute favor of God can no more consist with human merit than oil and water will fuse into one (see also Romans 4:4-5).

There are three principal characteristics of divine grace. First, it is eternal. Grace was planned before it was exercised, purposed before it was imparted: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). Second, it is free, for none ever purchased it: "Being justified freely by his grace" (Rom. 3:24). Third, it is sovereign, because God exercises it toward and bestows it upon whom He pleases: "Even so might grace reign" (Rom. 5:21). If grace reigns, then it is on the throne, and the occupant of the throne is sovereign. Hence, "the throne of grace" (Heb. 4:16).

Just because grace is unmerited favor, it must be exercised in a sovereign manner. Therefore the Lord declares, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Ex. 33:19). Were God to show grace to all of Adam's descendants, men would at once conclude that He was righteously compelled to take them to heaven as a compensation for allowing the human race to fall into sin. But God is under no obligation to any of His creatures, least of all to those who are rebels against Him.

Eternal life is a gift, therefore it can neither be earned by good works, nor claimed as a right. Seeing that salvation is a gift, who has any right to tell God on whom He ought to bestow it? It is not that the Giver ever refuses this gift to any who seek it wholeheartedly, and according to the rules which He has prescribed. No, He refuses none who come to Him empty handed and in the way of His appointing. But if out of a world of impenitent and unbelieving, God is determined to exercise His sovereign right by choosing a limited number to be saved, who is wronged? Is God obliged to force His gift on those who do not value it? Is God compelled to save those who are determined to go their own way?

Nothing riles the natural man more and brings to the surface his innate, inveterate enmity against God than to press upon him the eternity, the freeness, and the absolute sovereignty of divine grace. That God should have formed His purpose from everlasting, without in anywise consulting the creature, is too abasing for the unbroken heart. That grace cannot be earned or won by any efforts of man is too self-emptying for self-righteousness. That grace singles out whom it pleases to be its favored objects, arouses hot protests from haughty rebels. The clay rises up against the Potter and asks, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" A lawless insurrectionist dares to call into question the justice of divine sovereignty.

The distinguishing grace of God is seen in saving that people whom He has sovereignly singled out to be His high favorites. By "distinguishing" we mean that grace discriminates, makes differences, chooses some and passes by others. It was distinguishing grace which selected Abraham from the midst of his idolatrous neighbors and made him "the friend of God." Distinguishing grace saved "publicans and sinners," but said of the religious Pharisees, "Let them alone" (Matthew 15:14). Nowhere does the glory of God's free and sovereign grace shine more conspicuously than in the unworthiness and unlikeness of its objects. Beautifully was this illustrated by James Hervey in 1751:

Where sin has abounded, says the proclamation from the court of heaven, grace doth much more abound. Manasseh was a monster of barbarity, for he caused his own children to pass through the fire, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Manasseh was an adept in iniquity, for he not only multiplied, and to an extravagant degree, his own sacrilegious impieties, but he poisoned the principles and perverted the manners of his subjects, making them do worse than the most detestable of the heathen idolators (see 2 Chronicles 33). Yet, through this superabundant grace he is humbled, he is reformed, and becomes a child of forgiving love, an heir of immortal glory.

Behold that bitter and bloody persecutor, Saul; when breathing out threatenings and bent upon slaughter, he worried the lambs and put to death the disciples of Jesus. The havoc he had committed, the inoffensive families he had already ruined, were not sufficient to assuage his vengeful spirit. They were only a taste, which, instead of glutting the bloodhound, made him more closely pursue the track, and more eagerly pant for destruction. He is still thirsty for violence and murder. So eager and insatiable is his thirst, that he even breathes out threatening and slaughter (Acts 9:1). His words are spears and arrows, and his tongue a sharp sword. 'Tis as natural for him to menace the Christians as to breathe the air. Nay, they bled every hour in the purposes of his rancorous heart. It is only owing to want of power that every syllable he utters, every breath he draws, does not deal out deaths, and cause some of the innocent disciples to fall. Who, upon the principles of human judgment, would not have pronounced him a vessel of wrath, destined to unavoidable damnation? Nay, who would not have been ready to conclude that, if there were heavier chains and a deeper dungeon in the world of woe, they must surely be reserved for such an implacable enemy of true godliness? Yes, admire and adore the inexhaustible treasures of grace—this Saul is admitted into the goodly fellowship of the prophets, is numbered with the noble army of martyrs and makes a distinguished figure among the glorious company of the apostles.

The Corinthians were flagitious even to a proverb. Some of them wallowing in such abominable vices, and habituated themselves to such outrageous acts of injustice, as were a reproach to human nature. Yet, even these sons of violence and slaves of sensuality were washed, sanctified, justified (1 Cor. 6:9-11). "Washed," in the precious blood of a dying Redeemer; "sanctified," by the powerful operations of the blessed Spirit; "justified," through the infinitely tender mercies of a gracious God. Those who were once the burden of the earth, are now the joy of heaven, the delight of angels.

Now the grace of God is manifested in and by and through the Lord Jesus Christ. "The law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). This does not mean that God never exercised grace toward any before His Son became incarnate—Genesis 6:8 and Exodus 33:19 clearly show otherwise. But grace and truth were fully revealed and perfectly exemplified when the Redeemer came to this earth, and died for His people upon the cross. It is through Christ the Mediator alone that the grace of God flows to His elect. "Much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ . . . much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ . . . so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:15, 17, 21).

The grace of God is proclaimed in the Gospel (Acts 20:24), which is to the self-righteous Jew a "stumbling block," and to the conceited and philosophizing Greek "foolishness." Why so? Because there is nothing whatever in it that is adapted to gratify the pride of man. It announces that unless we are saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all. It declares that apart from Christ, the unspeakable Gift of God's grace, the state of every man is desperate, irremediable, hopeless. The Gospel addresses men as guilty, condemned, perishing criminals. It declares that the most chaste moralist is in the same terrible plight as the most voluptuous profligate; that the zealous professor, with all his religious performances, is no better off than the most profane infidel.

The Gospel contemplates every descendant of Adam as a fallen, polluted, hell-deserving, and helpless sinner. The grace which the Gospel publishes is his only hope. All stand before God convicted as transgressors of His holy Law, as guilty and condemned criminals; awaiting not sentence, but the execution of sentence already passed on them (John 3:18; Romans 3:19). To complain against the partiality of grace is suicidal. If the sinner insists upon bare justice, then the lake of fire must be his eternal portion. His only hope lies in bowing to the sentence which divine justice has passed upon him, owning the absolute righteousness of it, casting himself on the mercy of God, and stretching forth empty hands to avail himself of the grace of God made known to him in the Gospel.

The third Person in the Godhead is the Communicator of grace, therefore He is denominated "the spirit of grace" (Zech. 12:10). God the Father is the Fountain of all grace, for He purposed in Himself the everlasting covenant of redemption. God the Son is the only Channel of grace. The Gospel is the publisher of grace. The Spirit is the Bestower. He is the One who applies the Gospel in saving power to the soul, quickens the elect while spiritually dead, conquers their rebellious wills, melts their hard hearts, opens their blind eyes, cleanses them from the leprosy of sin. Thus we say with the late G. S. Bishop, in Grace in Galatians:

Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot lift the axe of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him, and so dead that He himself must open their graves and lift them into resurrection.

5. The Mercy of God

"O Give Thanks unto the LORD; for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. 136:1). For this perfection of the divine character God is greatly to be praised. Three times over in as many verses does the Psalmist call upon the saints to give thanks unto the Lord for this adorable attribute. Surely this is the least that can be asked from those who have been such bounteous gainers. When we contemplate the characteristics of this divine excellency, we cannot do otherwise than bless God for it. His mercy is "great" (1 Kings 3:6); "plenteous"

(Ps. 86:5); "tender" (Luke 1:78); "abundant" (1 Pet. 1:3); it is "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him" (Ps. 103:17). Well may we say with the psalmist, "I will sing aloud of thy mercy" (Ps. 59:16).

"I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (Ex. 33:19). Wherein differs the mercy of God from his grace? The mercy of God has its spring in the divine goodness. The first issue of God's goodness is His benignity or bounty, by which He gives liberally to His creatures, as creatures; thus He has given being and life to all things. The second issue of God's goodness is His mercy, which denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures. Thus, mercy presupposes sin.

Though it may not be easy at the first consideration to see a real difference between the grace and the mercy of God, it helps us if we carefully ponder His dealings with unfallen angels. He has never exercised mercy toward them, for they have never stood in any need thereof, not having sinned or come beneath the effects of the curse. Yet, they certainly are the objects of God's free and sovereign grace. First, because of His election of them from out of the whole angelic race (1 Tim. 5:21). Second, and in consequence of their election, because of His preservation of them from apostasy, when Satan rebelled and dragged down with him one-third of the celestial hosts (Rev. 12:4). Third, in making Christ their Head (Col. 2:10; 1 Peter 3:22), whereby they are eternally secured in the holy condition in which they were created. Fourth, because of the exalted position which has been assigned them: to live in God's immediate presence (Dan. 7:10), to serve Him constantly in His heavenly temple, to receive honorable commissions from Him (Heb. 1:14). This is abundant grace toward them; but mercy it is not.

In endeavoring to study the mercy of God as set forth in Scripture, a threefold distinction needs to be made, if the Word is to be "rightly divided." First, there is a general mercy of God, extended not only to all men, believers and unbelievers alike, but also to the entire creation: "His tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9); "He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). God has pity upon the brute creation in their needs, and supplies them with suitable provision.

Second, there is a special mercy of God, which is exercised toward the children of men, helping and succouring them, notwithstanding their sins. To them also He communicates all the necessities of life: "for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Third, there is a sovereign mercy reserved for the heirs of salvation, which is communicated to them in a covenant way, through the Mediator.

Following out a little further the difference between the second and third distinctions pointed out above, it is important to note that the mercies which God bestows on the wicked are solely of a temporal nature; that is to say, they are confined strictly to this present life. There will be no mercy extended to them beyond the grave. "It is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor" (Isa. 27:1 I).

But at this point a difficulty may suggest itself to some of our readers, namely, does not Scripture affirm that, "His mercy endureth forever" (Ps. 136:1)? Two things need to be pointed out in that connection. God can never cease to be merciful, for this is a quality of the divine essence (Ps. 116:5); but the exercise of His mercy is regulated by His sovereign will. This must be so, for there is nothing outside Himself which obliges Him to act. If there were, that something would be supreme, and God would cease to be God.

It is pure, sovereign grace which alone determines the exercise of divine mercy. God expressly affirms this fact in Romans 9:15, "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." It is not the wretchedness of the creature which causes Him to show mercy, for God is not influenced by things outside of Himself as we are. If God were influenced by the abject misery of leprous sinners, He would cleanse and save all of them. But He does not. Why? Simply because it is not His pleasure and purpose so to do. Still less is it the merits of the creature which causes Him to bestow mercies upon them, for it is a contradiction in terms to speak of meriting mercy. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5)—the one standing in direct antithesis from the other. Nor is it the merits of Christ which move God to bestow mercies on His elect; that would be putting the effect for the cause. It is "through", or

because of, the tender mercy of our God that Christ was sent here to His people (Luke 1:78). The merits of Christ make it possible for God to righteously bestow spiritual mercies on His elect, justice having been fully satisfied by the Surety! No, mercy arises solely from God's imperial pleasure.

Again, though it be true that God's mercy "endureth forever," yet we must observe carefully the objects to whom His mercy is shown. Even the casting of the reprobate into the lake of fire is an act of mercy. Punishment of the wicked is to be contemplated from a threefold viewpoint. From God's side, it is an act of justice, vindicating His honor. The mercy of God is never shown to the prejudice of His holiness and righteousness. From their side, it is an act of equity, when they are made to suffer the due reward of their iniquities.

But from the standpoint of the redeemed, the punishment of the wicked is an act of unspeakable mercy. How dreadful would it be if the present order of things should continue forever, when the children of God are obliged to live in the midst of the children of the devil. Heaven would at once cease to be heaven if the ears of the saints still heard the blasphemous, filthy language of the reprobate. What a mercy that in the New Jerusalem "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither worketh abomination" (Rev. 21:27)!

Lest the reader think that in the last paragraph we have been drawing upon our imagination, let us appeal to Scripture in support of what has been said. In Psalm 143:12 David prays, "And of thy mercy cut off mine enemies, and destroy all them that afflict my soul: for I am thy servant." Again, in Psalm 136:15, God "overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea: for His mercy endureth forever." It was an act of vengeance upon Pharaoh and his hosts, but it was an act of mercy unto the Israelites. Again, in Revelation 19:1-3:

I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up forever and ever.

From what has just been said, let us note how vain is the presumptuous hope of the wicked, who, notwithstanding their continued defiance of God, nevertheless count upon His being merciful to them. How many there are who say, I do not believe that God will ever cast me into hell; He is too merciful. Such a hope is a viper, which if cherished in their bosoms will sting them to death. God is a God of justice as well as mercy, and He has expressly declared that He will "by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:7). He has said, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Ps. 9:17). As well might men reason: I do not believe that if filth be allowed to accumulate and sewerage become stagnant and people deprive themselves of fresh air, that a merciful God will let them fall a prey to a deadly fever. The fact is that those who neglect the laws of health are carried away by disease, notwithstanding God's mercy. It is equally true that those who neglect the laws of spiritual health shall forever suffer the second death.

Unspeakably solemn is it to see so many abuse this divine perfection. They continue to despise God's authority, trample upon His laws, continue in sin, and yet presume upon His mercy. But God will not be unjust to Himself. God shows mercy to the truly penitent, but not to the impenitent (Luke 13:3). To continue in sin and yet reckon upon divine mercy remitting punishment is diabolical. It is saying, "Let us do evil that good may come," and of all such it is written, "whose damnation is just" (Rom. 3:8). Presumption shall most certainly be disappointed (read carefully Deuteronomy 29:18-20). Christ is the spiritual mercy seat, and all who despise and reject His Lordship shall "perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. 2:12).

But let our final thought be of God's spiritual mercies unto His own people. "Try mercy is great unto the heavens" (Ps. 57:10). The riches of it transcend our loftiest thought. "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Ps. 103:11). None can measure it. The elect are designated "vessels of mercy" (Rom. 9:23). It is mercy that quickened them when they were dead in sins (Eph. 2:4-5). It is mercy that saves them (Titus 3:5). It is His abundant mercy which begat them unto an eternal inheritance (1 Pet. 1:3). Time would fail us to tell of His preserving, sustaining, pardoning, supplying mercy. Unto His own, God is "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3).

"When all Thy mercies, O my God,
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view I'm lost,
In wonder, love, and praise."

6. The Love of God

Three Things are told us in Scripture concerning the nature of God. First, "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24). In the Greek there is no indefinite article. To say God is a spirit is most objectionable, for it places Him in a class with others. God is spirit in the highest sense. Because He is spirit He is incorporeal, having no visible substance. Had God a tangible body, He would not be omnipresent, He would be limited to one place; because He is spirit He fills heaven and earth.

Second, "God is light" (1 John 1:5), the opposite of darkness. In Scripture "darkness" stands for sin, evil, death; and "light" for holiness, goodness, life. "God is light" means that He is the sum of all excellency. Third, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). It is not simply that God loves, but that He is Love itself. Love is not merely one of His attributes, but His very nature.

There are many who talk about the love of God, who are total strangers to the God of love. The divine love is commonly regarded as a species of amiable weakness, a sort of good-natured indulgence; it is reduced to a mere sickly sentiment, patterned after human emotion. The truth is that on this, as on everything else, our thoughts need to be formed and regulated by what is revealed in Scripture. That there is urgent need for this is apparent not only from the ignorance which so generally prevails, but also from the low state of spirituality which is now so sadly evident everywhere among professing Christians. How little real love there is for God. One chief reason for this is because our hearts are so little occupied with His wondrous love for His people. The better we are acquainted with His love—its character, fullness, blessedness—the more our hearts will be drawn out in love to Him.

1. The love of God is uninfluenced. By this we mean, there was nothing whatever in the objects of His love to call it into exercise, nothing in the creature to attract or prompt it. The love which one creature has for another is because of something in them; but the love of God is free, spontaneous, uncaused. The only reason God loves any is found in His own sovereign will: "The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the LORD loved you" (Deut. 7:7-8). God has loved His people from everlasting, and therefore nothing of the creature can be the cause of what is found in God from eternity. He loves from Himself, "according to his own purpose" (2 Tim. 1:9).

"We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God did not love us because we loved Him, but He loved us before we had a particle of love for Him. Had God loved us in return for ours, then it would not be spontaneous on His part; but because He loved us when we were loveless, it is clear that His love was uninfluenced. It is highly important if God is to be honored and the heart of His child established, that we should be clear on this precious truth. God's love for me, and for each of "His own," was entirely unmoved by anything in them. What was there in me to attract the heart of God? Absolutely nothing. But, to the contrary, everything to repel Him, everything calculated to make Him loathe me—sinful, depraved, a mass of corruption, with "no good thing" in me.

"What was there in me that could merit esteem,

Or give the Creator delight?

'Twas even so, Father, I ever must sing,

Because it seemed good in Thy sight."

2. It is eternal. This of necessity. God Himself is eternal, and God is love; therefore, as God Himself had no beginning, His love had none. Granted that such a concept far transcends the grasp of our finite minds, nevertheless, where we cannot comprehend, we can bow in adoring worship. How clear is the testimony of Jeremiah 31:3, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." How blessed to know that the great and holy God loved His people before heaven and earth were called into existence, that He had set His heart upon them from all eternity. Clear proof is this that His love is spontaneous, for He loved them endless ages before they had any being.

The same precious truth is set forth in Ephesians 1:4-5, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us." What praise should this evoke from each of His children! How quieting for the heart. Since God's love toward me had no beginning, it can have no ending! Since it is true that "from everlasting to everlasting" He is God, and since God is love, then it is equally true that "from everlasting to everlasting" He loves His people.

3. It is sovereign. This also is self-evident. God Himself is sovereign, under obligation to none, a law unto Himself, acting always according to His own imperial pleasure. Since God is sovereign, and since He is love, it necessarily follows that His love is sovereign. Because God is God, He does as He pleases; because God is love, He loves whom He pleases. Such is His own express affirmation: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13). There was no more reason in Jacob why he should be the object of divine love than there was in Esau. They both had the same parents, and were born at the same time, being twins, yet God loved the one and hated the other! Why? Because it pleased Him to do so.

The sovereignty of God's love necessarily follows from the fact that it is uninfluenced by anything in the creature. Thus, to affirm that the cause of His love lies in God Himself, is only another way of saying, He loves whom He pleases. For a moment, assume the opposite. Suppose God's love were regulated by anything else than His will, in such a case He would love by rule, and loving by rule He would be under a law of love, and then so far from being free, God would Himself be ruled by law. "In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to"—what? Some excellency which He foresaw in them? No. What then? "According to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5).

4. It is infinite. Everything about God is infinite. His essence fills heaven and earth. His wisdom is unlimitable, for He knows everything of the past, present, and future. His power is unbounded, for there is nothing too hard for Him. So His love is without limit. There is a depth to it which none can fathom; there is a height to it which none can scale; there is a length and breadth to it which defies measurement by any creature standard. Beautifully this is intimated in Ephesians 2:4, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." The word "great" there is parallel with the "God so loved" of John 3:16. It tells us that the love of God is so transcendent it cannot be estimated.

No tongue can fully express the infinitude of God's love, or any mind comprehend it: it "passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). The most extensive ideas that a finite mind can frame about divine love, are infinitely below its true nature. The heaven is not so far above the earth as the goodness of God is beyond the most raised conceptions which we are able to form of it. It is an ocean which swells higher than all the mountains of opposition in such as are the objects of it. It is a fountain from which flows all necessary good to all those who are interested in it (John Brine, 1743).

5. It is immutable. As with God Himself there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17), so His love knows neither change or diminution. The worm Jacob supplies a forceful example of this: "Jacob have I loved," declared Jehovah, and despite all his unbelief and waywardness, He never ceased to love him. John 13:1 furnishes another beautiful illustration. That very night one of the apostles would say, "Show us the Father"; another would deny Him with cursings; all of them would be scandalized by and forsake Him. Nevertheless, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." The divine love is subject to no vicissitudes. Divine love is "strong as death . . . many waters cannot quench it" (Song 8:6-7). Nothing can separate from it (Rom. 8:35-39).

"His love no end nor measure knows,

No change can turn its course,

Eternally the same it flows

From one eternal source."

6. It is holy. God's love is not regulated by caprice, passion, or sentiment, but by principle. Just as His grace reigns not at the expense of it, but "through righteousness" (Rom. 5:21), so His love never conflicts with His holiness. "God is light" (1 John 1:5) is mentioned before "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God's love is no mere amiable weakness, or effeminate softness. Scripture declares, "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). God will not wink at sin, even in His own people. His love is pure, unmixed with any maudlin sentimentality.

7. It is gracious. The love and favor of God are inseparable. This is clearly brought out in Romans 8:32-39. What that love is from which there can be no "separation," is easily perceived from the design and scope of the immediate context. It is that goodwill and grace of God which determined Him to give His Son for sinners. That love was the impulsive power of Christ's incarnation: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). Christ died not in order to make God love us, but because He did love His people. Calvary is the supreme demonstration of divine love. Whenever you are tempted to doubt the love of God, Christian reader, go back to Calvary.

Here then is abundant cause for trust and patience under divine affliction. Christ was beloved of the Father, yet He was not exempted from poverty, disgrace, and persecution. He hungered and thirsted. Thus, it was not incompatible with God's love for Christ when He permitted men to spit upon and smite Him. Then let no Christian call into question God's love when he is brought under painful afflictions and trials. God did not enrich Christ on earth with temporal prosperity, for "He had not where to lay his head." But He did give Him the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). Learn that spiritual blessings are the principal gifts of divine love. How blessed to know that when the world hates us, God loves us!

7. The Wrath of God

It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology; or at least they wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight. They like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts.

Yes, many turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the divine character, or some blot upon the divine government. But what says the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the fact of His wrath. He is not ashamed to make it known that vengeance and fury belong to Him. His own challenge is, "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive: I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me" (Deut. 32:39-41). A study of the concordance shows that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. Because God is holy, He hates all sin; because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner (Ps. 7:11).

The wrath of God is as much a divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God. Yet there would be if "wrath" were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who does not hate it is a moral leper. How could He who is the sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:12) toward it?

How could He who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, not loathe and hate that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite, as heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but also there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another.

The wrath of God is eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No. While God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.

That divine wrath is one of the perfections of God is not only evident from the considerations presented above, but is also clearly established by the express declarations of His own Word.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven (Rom. 1:18). "It was revealed when the sentence of death was first pronounced, the earth cursed, and man driven out of the earthly paradise; and afterwards by such examples of punishment as those of the deluge and the destruction of the cities of the plain by fire from heaven; but especially by the reign of death throughout the world. It was proclaimed in the curse of the Law on every transgression, and was intimated in the institution of sacrifice. In the 8th of Romans, the apostle calls the attention of believers to the fact that the whole creation has become subject to vanity, and groaneth and travaileth together in pain. The same creation which declares that there is a God, and publishes His glory, also proclaims that He is the enemy of sin and the avenger of the crimes of men. But above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest the divine character, and when that wrath was displayed in His sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of His displeasure against sin. Besides this, the future and eternal punishment of the wicked is now declared in terms more solemn and explicit than formerly. Under the new dispensation there are two revelations given from heaven, one of wrath, the other of grace (Robert Haldane).

Again, that the wrath of God is a divine perfection is plainly demonstrated by what we read in Psalm 95:11, "Unto whom I swear in my wrath." There are two occasions of God "swearing": in making promises (Gen. 22:16), and in denouncing threatening (Deut. 1:34). In the former, He swears in mercy to His children; in the latter, He swears to terrify the wicked. An oath is for solemn confirmation (Heb. 6:16). In Genesis 22:16, God said, "By myself have I sworn." In Psalm 89:35, He declares, "Once have I sworn by my holiness"; while in Psalm 95:11 He affirmed, "I swear in My wrath." Thus the great Jehovah Himself appeals to His wrath as a perfection equal to His holiness: He swears by the one as much as by the other. Again; as in Christ "dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and as all the divine perfections are illustriously displayed by Him (John 1:18), therefore we read of "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16).

The wrath of God is a perfection of the divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate. First, so that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely we are to realize its heinousness.

Second, to beget a true fear in our souls for God: "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). We cannot serve Him acceptably unless there is due reverence for His awful Majesty and godly fear of His righteous anger; these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that "our God is a consuming fire." Third, to draw out our souls in fervent praise for having delivered us from "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).

Our readiness or our reluctance to meditate upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts really are affected toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of all the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth the love of God in us? Each of us

needs to be most prayerfully on guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old, the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether . . . as thyself" (Ps. 50:21), If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of his holiness" (Ps. 97:12), if we rejoice not to know that in a soon coming day God will make a glorious display of His wrath, by taking vengeance on all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are not in subjection to Him; that we are yet in our sins.

"Rejoice, O ye nations [Gentiles] with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries" (Deut. 32:43). And again, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the LORD our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia" (Rev. 19:1). Great will be the rejoicing of saints in that day when the Lord shall vindicate His majesty, exercise His awful dominion, magnify His justice, and overthrow the proud rebels who dared to defy Him.

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark [impute] iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Well may each of us ask this question, for it is written, "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment" (Ps. 1:5). How sorely was Christ's soul exercised with thoughts of God's marking the iniquities of His people when they were upon Him. He was "amazed, and very heavy" (Mark 4:33). His awful agony, His bloody sweat, His strong cries and supplications (Heb. 5:7), His repeated prayers, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," His last dreadful cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" all manifest what fearful apprehensions He had of what it was for God to "mark iniquities." Well may poor sinners cry out, Lord who shall "stand" when the Son of God Himself so trembled beneath the weight of His wrath? If you, my reader, have not "fled for refuge" to Christ, the only Savior, "how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan" (Jer. 12:5)?

When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said, The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince hath an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them in provision, but lays close siege to the place, and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God, that could wink all His enemies into destruction, bears with them, and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may He command us to bless them that curse us, who Himself does good to the evil and unthankful. But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God's mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable His patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire (William Gurnall, 1660).

Then flee, my reader, flee to Christ; "flee from the wrath to come" (Matthew 3:7) ere it is too late.

A word to preachers: Do we in our oral ministry preach on this solemn subject as much as we ought? The Old Testament prophets frequently told their hearers that their wicked lives provoked the Holy One of Israel, and that they were treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. Conditions in the world are no better now than they were then! Nothing is so calculated to arouse the careless and cause carnal professors to search their hearts, as to enlarge upon the fact that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11).

The forerunner of Christ warned his hearers to "flee from the wrath to come" (Matthew 3:7). The Savior bade His auditors, "Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him" (Luke 12:5). Paul said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Faithfulness demands that we speak as plainly about hell as about heaven.

8. The Contemplation of God

We Reviewed in previous chapters some of the wondrous and lovely perfections of the divine character. From this contemplation of His attributes, it should be evident to us all that God is, first, an incomprehensible Being; and, lost in wonder at His infinite greatness, we adopt the words of Zophar, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea" (Job

11:7-9). When we turn our thoughts to God's eternity, His immateriality, His omnipresence, His almightiness, our minds are overwhelmed.

But the incomprehensibility of the divine nature is no reason why we should desist from reverent inquiry and prayerful striving to apprehend what He has so graciously revealed of Himself in His Word. Because we are unable to acquire perfect knowledge, it would be folly to say we will therefore make no efforts to attain to any degree of it. C. H. Spurgeon has well said:

Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued, investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and Him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.

The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the great God which he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go on our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumbline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought "I am but of yesterday and know nothing" (sermon on Malachi 3:6).

Yes, the incomprehensibility of the divine nature should teach us humility, caution, and reverence. After all our searchings and meditations we have to say with Job, "Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him?" (Job 26:14). When Moses besought Jehovah for a sight of His glory, He answered him "I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee" (Ex. 33:19); as another has said, "the name is the collection of His attributes." Rightly did the Puritan John Howe declare:

The notion therefore we can hence form of His glory, is only such as we may have of a large volume by a brief synopsis, or of a spacious country by a little landscape. He hath here given us a true report of Himself, but not a full; such as will secure our apprehensions—being guided thereby—from error, but not from ignorance. We can apply our minds to contemplate the several perfections whereby the blessed God discovers to us His being, and can in our thoughts attribute them all to Him, though we have still but low and defective conceptions of each one. Yet so far as our apprehensions can correspond to the discovery that He affords us of His several excellencies, we have a present view of His glory.

The difference is great between the knowledge of God which His saints have in this life and that which they shall have in heaven; yet, as the former should not be undervalued because it is imperfect, so the latter is not to be magnified above its reality. True, the Scripture declares that we shall see "face to face" and "know" even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12), but to infer from this that we shall then know God as fully as He knows us, is to be misled by the mere sound of words, and to disregard that restriction of the same which the subject necessarily requires. There is a vast difference between the saints being glorified and their being made divine. In their glorified state, Christians will still be finite creatures, and therefore, never able to fully comprehend the infinite God.

The saints in heaven will see God with the eye of the mind, for He will be always invisible to the bodily eye; and will see Him more clearly than they could see Him by reason and faith, and more extensively than all His works and dispensations had hitherto revealed Him; but their minds will not be so enlarged as to be capable of contemplating at once, or in detail, the whole excellence of His nature. To comprehend infinite perfection, they must become infinite themselves. Even in heaven, their knowledge will be partial, but at the same time their happiness will be complete, because their knowledge will be perfect in this sense, that it will be adequate to the capacity of the subject, although it will not exhaust the fullness of the object. We believe that it will be progressive, and that as their views expand, their blessedness will increase; but it will never reach a limit beyond which there is nothing to be discovered; and when ages after ages have passed away, He will still be the incomprehensible God (John Dick, 1840).

Second, from a review of the perfections of God, it appears that He is an all-sufficient Being. He is all-sufficient in Himself and to Himself. As the First of beings, He could receive nothing from another, nor be limited by the power of another. Being infinite, He is possessed of all possible perfection. When the Triune God existed all alone, He was all to Himself. His understanding, His love, His energies, found an adequate object in Himself. Had He stood in need of anything external, He had not been independent, and therefore would not have been God.

He created all things, and that "for himself" (Col. 1:16), yet it was not in order to supply a lack, but that He might communicate life and happiness to angels and men, and admit them to the vision of His glory. True, He demands the allegiance and services of His intelligent creatures, yet He derives no benefit from their offices, all the advantage redounds to themselves (Job 22:2-3). He makes use of means and instruments to accomplish His ends, yet not from a deficiency of power, but oftentimes to more strikingly display His power through the febleness of the instruments.

The all-sufficiency of God makes Him the Supreme Object which is ever to be sought. True happiness consists only in the enjoyment of God. His favor is life, and His loving kindness is better than life. "The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him" (Lam. 3:24); our perceptions of His love, His grace, His glory, are the chief objects of the saints' desire and the springs of their highest satisfaction. "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4:6-7). Yes, the Christian, when in his right mind, is able to say, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17-18). Third, from a review of the perfections of God, it appears that He is the Sovereign of the universe. John Dick said:

No dominion is so absolute as that which is founded on creation. He who might not have made any thing, had a right to make all things according to His own pleasure. In the exercise of His uncontrolled power, He has made some parts of the creation mere inanimate matter, of grosser or more refined texture, and distinguished by different qualities, but all inert and unconscious. He has given organization to other parts, and made them susceptible of growth and expansion, but still without life in the proper sense of the term. To others He has given not only organization, but conscious existence, organs of sense and self-motive power. To these He has added in man the gift of reason, and an immortal spirit, by which he is allied to a higher order of beings who are placed in the superior regions. Over the world which He has created, He sways the scepter of omnipotence. "I praised and honored him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doeth thou?" (Dan. 4:34-35).

A creature, considered as such, has no rights. He can demand nothing from his Maker; and in whatever manner he may be treated, has no title to complain. Yet, when thinking of the absolute dominion of God over all, we ought never to lose sight of His moral perfections. God is just and good, and ever does that which is right. Nevertheless, He exercises His sovereignty according to His own imperial and righteous pleasure.

He assigns each creature his place as seems good in His own sight. He orders the varied circumstances of each according to His own counsels. He molds each vessel according to His own uninfluenced determination. He has mercy on whom He will, and whom He will He hardens. Wherever we are, His eye is upon us. Whoever we are, our life and everything is held at His disposal. To the Christian, He is a tender Father; to the rebellious sinner He will yet be a consuming fire. "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim. 1:17).

9. The Bounties of God

"Eye Hath Not Seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). How often this passage is quoted only that far; how rarely are

the words added, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (verse 10). Why is this? Is it because so few of God's people search out and enjoy what the Spirit has revealed in the Word about those things God has prepared for them that love Him? If we were more occupied with God's riches than with our poverty, Christ's fullness than our emptiness, the divine bounties than our leanness, on what a different plane of experience we would live!

We are much impressed by noting some of "the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). It is striking to note that our Christian life starts at a marriage feast (Luke 14:16-23; Matthew 2-10), just as Christ's first miracle was wrought at one (John 2). The word to us is, "Come, for all things are now ready" (Luke 14:17); "Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage" (Matthew 22:4). Observe the "I have prepared," agreeing with "the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Notice the "are ready," confirming "God hath revealed them unto us" (1 Cor. 2:10). Mark the "my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings," for "all things are of God" (2 Cor. 5:18). The creature contributes nothing; all is provided for him. Finally, weigh the "come unto the marriage." The figure is very blessed; it speaks of joy, festivity, feasting.

He spread the banquet, made me eat.

Bid all my fears remove,

Yea, o'er my guilty, rebel head

He placed His banner—Love.

Practically the same figure is employed by Christ again in Luke 15. There He pictures the penitent prodigal welcomed home by the father. No sooner is he clothed and fitted for the house than the words go forth, "Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry" (verse 23); and we are told "they began to be merry." In the parable, that merriment met with no reverse, since it is portrayed without a break and without a bound. Then we may conclude that this newborn joy ought to characterize all this festive scene—as truly so now, as soon it will be in glory.

A beautiful type of the lavish manner in which God bestows His bounties upon His people is found in Genesis 9:3: "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things." This was Jehovah's response to the "sweet savor" which He had just smelled. It is most important that we should note the connection, and perceive the ground on which God so freely bestowed "all things" upon the patriarch. At the close of Genesis 8 Noah built an altar unto the Lord, and presented burnt offerings. At the beginning of Genesis 9 we learn God's answer, which blessedly foreshadowed the unmeasured portion bestowed upon the new creation, the members of which have been blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

These blessings are based upon God's estimate of the value of Christ's sacrifice of Himself. The abiding worth of that sacrifice is immeasurable and illimitable, as immeasurable as the personal excellency of the Son, as illimitable as the Father's delight in Him. The nature and extent of those blessings, which accrue to God's elect on the ground of Christ's finished work, are intimated by the substantives and adjectives employed by the Holy Spirit when He describes the profuseness of the divine bounties already bestowed upon us, and which we shall enjoy forever!

Take first God's grace. Not only are we told of the "riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7), and of the "exceeding riches of His grace" (Eph. 2:7), but also we read that it has "abounded unto many," and that we receive "abundance of grace," yes, that grace has super-abounded (Gr., Romans 5:15, 17, 20)—the limitless wealth of divine grace flowing forth and multiplying itself in its objects. The foundation or moving cause of this is found in John 1. When the only begotten Son became flesh and tabernacled here for a season, it was as One who was "full of grace and truth." Because we have been made joint heirs with Him it is written, "And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace" (verse 16).

Take again God's love. There has been neither reserve nor restraint in the outflow of His love to its loveless, unlovely objects. He has loved His people with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). Wondrously He manifested it, for when the fullness of time was come, He sent forth His Son, born of a woman. Yes, He did so love the world as to give His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life": therefore we read of His "great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph. 2:4). The Greek word translated "great" is rendered "plenteous" (Matthew 9:37), and "abundant" (1 Pet. 1:3). Love unmeasured, that passes knowledge, fills our lives with its unceasing ministrations, ever active in priesthood and advocacy on high, how truly it is love abundant.

Our present theme is inexhaustible. Our Lord came here that His people "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). This was first made good when Christ, as the Head of the new creation and the "beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14), breathed on His disciples, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit." It was the risen Savior communicating His resurrection life to His own (compare Genesis 2:7 for the beginning of the old creation). So too when that same One, who down here received the Spirit without measure (John 3:34), ascended on high as the glorified Man, He baptized His people in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). As the apostle Paul assures Gentile saints, "He shed on us abundantly" (Titus 3:6). Once more, he emphasized the profuseness of God's bounties.

Consider now His confidences. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). There are things which the angels "desire to look into" (1 Pet. 1:12), yet they have been made known to us by God's Spirit. What a word in Ephesians, "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will" (Eph. 1:8-9) This may be termed the abundance of His counsels.

Once more, consider the exercise and display of His power. Paul prayed that we might know, "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19-20). Here was the might of God working transcendentally in an objective way; its correlative is recorded in Ephesians 3:20: "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Clearly this is the highest putting forth of energy, working subjectively.

In such lavish measure then God has blessed His people. As the apostle wrote to the Colossians concerning Him, "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete [filled full] in him" (Col. 2:9-10). But it is one thing to know, intellectually, of these bounties of God; it is quite another, by faith, to make them our own. It is one thing to be familiar with the letter of them; it is another to live in their power and be the personal expression of them.

What shall our response be to such divine munificence? Surely it is that "the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:15). Surely it is that we should "abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 15:13). It is only here that hope finds its sphere of exercise, since only in the saints will it receive full fruition. If God speaks so uniformly of the varied character of our blessing—whether it be His grace, His love, His life imparted to us, His confidences, His power, His mercy (1 Pet. 1:3 ff.)—as being so abundant, it must be because He wants to impress our hearts with the exuberance of the bounties He has bestowed on us. The practical effect of this on our souls should cause us to "joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:11), to draw out all that is within us in true worship, to fit us for a closer and deeper fellowship with Him. "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8).

10. The Gifts of God

A GIVING GOD! What a concept! To our regret, our familiarity with it often dulls our sense of wonderment at it. There is nothing that resembles such a concept in the religions of heathendom. Very much to the contrary; their deities are portrayed as monsters of cruelty and greed, always exacting painful sacrifices from deluded

devotees. But the God of Scripture is portrayed as the Father of mercies, "who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). It is true that: He has His own rights—the rights of His holiness and proprietorship. Nor does He rescind them, but rather enforces them. But what we would contemplate here is something which transcends reason and had never entered our minds to conceive. The Divine Claimer is at once the Divine Meeter. He required satisfaction of His broken Law, and Himself supplied it. His just claims are met by His own grace. He who asks for sacrifices from us made the supreme sacrifice for us! God is both the Demander and the Donor, the Requirer and the Provider.

1. The gift of His Son. Of old the language of prophecy announced: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" (Isa. 9:6). Accordingly, the angels announced to the shepherds at the time of His advent: "Unto you is born this day . . . a Savior" (Luke 2:11). That gift was the supreme exemplification of the divine benignity. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). That was the guaranty of all other blessings. As the apostle argued from the greater to the less, assuring us that Christ is at once the pledge and channel of every other mercy: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). God did not withhold His choicest treasure, the darling of His bosom, but freely yielded Him up; and the love that spared not Him will not begrudge anything that is for the good of His people.

2. The gift of His Spirit. The Son is God's all-inclusive gift. As Manton said, "Christ cometh not to us empty handed: His person and His benefits are not divided. He came to purchase all manner of blessings for us." The greatest of these is the Holy Spirit, who applies and communicates what the Lord Jesus obtained for His people. God pardoned and justified His elect in Old Testament times on the ground of the atonement, which His Son should make at the appointed time. On the same basis He communicated to them the Spirit (Num. 9:25; Nehemiah 9:20), otherwise none would have been regenerated, fitted for communion with God, or enabled to bring forth spiritual fruit. But He then wrought more secretly, rather than "in demonstration and in power"; came as "the dew," rather than was "poured out" copiously; was restricted to Israel, rather than communicated to Gentiles also. The Spirit in His fullness was God's ascension gift to Christ (Acts 2:33) and Christ's coronation gift to His Church (John 16:7). The gift of the Spirit was purchased for His people by Christ (see Galatians 3:13-14 and note carefully the second "that" in verse 14). Every blessing we receive is through the merits and mediation of Christ.

3. The gift of life. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). There is a double antithesis between those two things. First, the justice of God will render unto the wicked what is due them for their sins, but His mercy bestows upon His people what they do not deserve. Second, eternal death follows as a natural and inevitable consequence from what is in and done by its objects. Not so eternal life, for it is bestowed without any consideration of something in or from its subjects. It is communicated and sustained gratuitously. Eternal life is a free bounty, not only unmerited but also unsolicited by us, for in every instance God has reason to say, "I am found of them that sought me not" (Isa. 65:1; cf. Romans 3:11). The recipient is wholly passive. He does not act, but is acted upon when he is brought from death unto life. Eternal life -- a spiritual life now, a life of glory hereafter—is sovereignly and freely bestowed by God. Yet it is also a blessing communicated by Him unto His elect because the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price of redemption. Yes, it is actually dispensed by Christ. "I give unto them [not merely "offer"] eternal life" (John 10:28; see also 17:3).

4. The gift of spiritual understanding. "And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true" (1 John 5:20). What is communicated to the saint when he is born again is wholly spiritual and exactly suited for taking in the Scriptural knowledge of Christ. It is not an entirely new faculty which is then imparted, but rather the renewing of the original one, fitting it for the apprehension of new objects. It consists of an internal illumination, a divine light that shines in our hearts, enabling us to discern the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). Though we are not now admitted into a corporeal sight of Christ, yet He is made a living reality to those who have been quickened into newness of life. By this divine renewing of the understanding we can now perceive the peerless excellency and perfect suitability of Christ. The knowledge we have of Him is seated in the understanding. That fires the

affections, sanctifies the will, and raises the mind into being fixed upon Him. Such a spiritual understanding is not attained by any efforts of ours, but is a supernatural bestowment, a divine gift conferred upon the elect, which admits them into the secrets of the Most High.

5. The gift of faith. The salvation of God does not actually become ours until we believe in, rest upon, and receive Christ as a personal Savior. But as we cannot see without both sight and light, neither can we believe until life and faith are divinely communicated to us. Accordingly, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Arminians would make the second clause of verse 8 a mere repetition of the first, and in less expressive and emphatic language. Since salvation is by grace, it is superfluous to add that it is "not of yourselves." But because "faith" is our act, it was necessary—so that the excellency of it should not be arrogated by the creature, but ascribed unto God—to point out that it is not of ourselves. The very faith which receives a gratuitous salvation is not the unassisted act of man's own will. As God must give me breath before I can breathe, so faith ere I believe. Compare also "faith which is by him" (Acts 3:16); "who believe, according to the working of his mighty power" (Eph. 1:19); "through the faith of the operation of God" (Col. 2:12); "who by him do believe in God" (1 Pet. 1:21).

6. The gift of repentance. While it is the bound duty of every sinner to repent (Acts 17:30)—for ought he not to cease from and abhor his rebellion against God?—yet he is so completely under the blinding power of sin that a miracle of grace is necessary before he will do so. A broken and a contrite spirit are of God's providing. It is the Holy Spirit who illuminates the understanding to perceive the heinousness of sin, the heart to loathe it, and the will to repudiate it. Faith and repentance are the first evidence of spiritual life. For when God quickens a sinner He convicts him of the evil of sin, causes him to hate it, moves him to sorrow over and turn from it. "Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded" (Jer. 31:19). "All His grace in us" (Matthew Henry). Compare "a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel" (Acts 5:31); "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18); "if God peradventure will give them repentance" (2 Tim. 2:25).

7. The gift of grace. "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4). Grace is used there in its widest sense, including all the benefits of Christ's merits and mediation, providential or spiritual, temporal or eternal. It includes regenerating, sanctifying, preserving grace, as well as every particular grace of the new nature—faith, hope, love. "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7), that is, according as He is pleased to bestow, and not according to our ability or asking. Therefore we have no cause to be proud or boastful. Whatever grace we have to resist the devil, patiently bear affliction, or overcome the world, is from Him. Whatever obedience we perform, or devotion we render Him, or sacrifice we make, is of His grace. Therefore must we confess, "for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chron. 29:14).