

PRETORIA NORTH BAPTIST CHURCH



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*THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD*  
*PART 1*  
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## 1. The Solitariness of God

Perhaps the Title of the chapter is not sufficiently explicit to indicate its theme. This is partly because, so few are accustomed to meditate upon the personal perfections of God. Comparatively few who occasionally read the Bible are aware of the awe-inspiring and worship-provoking grandeur of the divine character. That God is great in wisdom, wondrous in power, yet full of mercy is assumed by many as common knowledge. But to entertain anything approaching an adequate conception of His being, nature, and attributes, as revealed in the Scripture, is something which very few people in these degenerate times have done. God is solitary in His excellency. "Who is like unto Thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Ex. 15:11).

"In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). There was a time, if "time" it could be called, when God, in the unity of His nature (though subsisting equally in three persons), dwelt all alone. "In the beginning, God." There was no heaven, where His glory is now particularly manifested. There was no earth to engage His attention. There were no angels to sing His praises. There was no universe to be upheld by the word of His power. There was nothing, no one, but God; and that not for a day, a year, or an age, but "from everlasting." During a past eternity God was alone—self-contained, self-sufficient, in need of nothing. Had a universe, or angels, or humans been necessary to Him in any way, they also would have been called into existence from all eternity. Creating them when He did added nothing to God essentially. He changes not (Mal. 3:6), therefore His essential glory can be neither augmented nor diminished.

God was under no constraint, no obligation, no necessity to create. That He chose to do so was purely a sovereign act on His part, caused by nothing outside Himself, determined by nothing but His own good pleasure; for He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). That He did create was simply for His manifestative glory. Do some of our readers imagine that we have gone beyond what Scripture warrants? Then we appeal to the Law and the testimony: "Stand up and bless the LORD, your God, for ever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Neh. 9:5). God is no gainer even from our worship. He was in no need of that external glory of His grace which arises from His redeemed, for He is glorious enough in Himself without that. What was it that moved Him to predestinate His elect to the praise of the glory of His grace? It was "according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5).

We are well aware that the high ground we tread here is new and strange to almost all of our readers, so it is well to move slowly. Let us appeal again to the Scriptures. As the apostle brings to a close a long argument on salvation by sovereign grace, he asks, "For who hath known the mind of the LORD? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Rom. 11:34-35). The force of this is that it is impossible to bring the Almighty under obligation to the creature. God gains nothing from us. "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth He of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man" (Job 35:7-8). But it certainly cannot affect God, who is all-blessed in himself. "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants" (Luke 17:10)—our obedience has profited nothing.

We go farther: our Lord Jesus Christ added nothing to God in His essential being and glory, either by what He did or suffered. True, gloriously true, He manifested that glory of God to us, but He added nothing to God. He Himself expressly declares so, and there is no appeal from His words, "My goodness extendeth not to thee" (Ps. 16:2). The whole of that psalm is a psalm of Christ. Christ's goodness or righteousness reached unto His saints in the earth (Ps. 16:3), but God was high above and beyond it all.

It is true that God is both honored and dishonored by men, not in His essential being, but in His official character. It is equally true that God has been glorified by creation, by providence, and by redemption. We do not dare dispute this for a moment. But all of this has to do with His manifestative glory and the recognition of it by us. Yet, had God so pleased, He might have continued alone for all eternity, without making known His glory unto creatures. Whether He should do so or not He determined solely by His own will. He was perfectly blessed in Himself before the first creature was called into being. And what are all the creatures of His hands unto Him even now? The Scripture again answers:

Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom, then, will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto him? (Isa. 40:15-18).

That is the God of Scripture; but, He is still "the unknown God" (Acts 17:23) to heedless multitudes. "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are like grasshoppers; that stretch out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: Who bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity" (Isa. 40:22-23). How vastly different is the God of Scripture from the god of the average pulpit!

Nor is the testimony of the New Testament any different from that of the Old. How could it be since both have one and the same Author? There too we read, "Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see; to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Tim. 6:15-16). Such a One is to be revered, worshipped, adored. He is solitary in His majesty, unique in His excellency, peerless in His perfections. He sustains all, but is Himself independent of all. He gives to all and is enriched by none.

Such a God cannot be found out by searching. He can be known only as He is revealed to the heart by the Holy Spirit through the Word. It is true that creation demonstrates a Creator, and so plainly that men are "without excuse." Yet we still have to say with Job, "Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of him? But the thunder of His power, who can understand?" (Job 26:14). The so-called argument from design by well-meaning apologists has, we believe, done much more harm than good. It has attempted to bring the great God down to the level of finite comprehension, and thereby has lost sight of His solitary excellence

Analogy has been drawn between a savage who finds a watch upon the sands, and from a close examination of it infers a watchmaker. So far so good. But attempt to go farther. Suppose the savage sits on the sand and endeavors to form a conception of this watchmaker, his personal affections and manners, his disposition, acquirements, and moral character, all that goes to make up a personality. Could he ever think or reason out a real man, the man who made the watch, so he could say, "I am acquainted with him"? It seems trifling to ask, but is the eternal and infinite God so much more within the grasp of human reason? No, indeed. The God of Scripture can be known only by those to whom He makes Himself known.

Nor is God known by the intellect. "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24), and therefore can only be known spiritually. But fallen man is not spiritual, he is carnal. He is dead to all that is spiritual. Unless he is born again, supernaturally brought from death unto life, miraculously translated out of darkness into light, he cannot even see the things of God (John 3:3), still less apprehend them (1 Cor. 2:14). The Holy Spirit has to shine in our hearts (not intellects) to give us "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). But even that spiritual knowledge is fragmentary. The regenerated soul has to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet. 3:18).

The principal prayer and aim of Christians should be to "walk worthy of the LORD unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

## **2. The Decrees of God**

The Decree Of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things. We have used the singular number as Scripture does (Rom. 8:28; Ephesians 3:11), because there was only one act of His infinite mind about future things. But we speak as if there had been many, because our minds are only capable of thinking of successive revolutions, as thoughts and occasions arise, or in reference to the various objects of His decree, being many, they seem to us to require a distinct purpose for each. But an infinite understanding does not proceed by steps, from one stage to another: "Known unto God are all His works, from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

The Scriptures mention the decrees of God in many passages, and in a variety of terms. The word "decree" is found in Psalm 2:7. In Ephesians 3:11 we see His "eternal purpose;" in Acts 2:23, His "determinate counsel and foreknowledge;" in Ephesians 1:9, the mystery of His "will;" in Romans 8:29 that He also did "predestinate;" in Ephesians 1:9, His "good pleasure." God's decrees are called His "counsel" to signify they are consummately wise. They are called God's "will" to show He was under no control, but acted according to His own pleasure. When a man's will is the rule of his conduct, it is usually capricious and unreasonable; but wisdom is always associated with will in the divine proceedings, and accordingly, God's decrees are said to be "the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception; whatever is done in time, was foreordained before time began. God's purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil. But with reference to the latter we must be careful to state that while God is the Orderer and Controller of sin, He is not the Author of it in the same way that He is the Author of good. Sin could not proceed from a Holy God by positive and direct creation, but only by decretive permission and negative action. God's decree, as comprehensive as His government, extends to all creatures and events. It was concerned about our life and death; about our state in time, and our state in eternity. As God works all things after the counsel of His own will, we learn from His works what His counsel is (was), as we judge an architect's plan by inspecting the building erected under his direction.

God did not merely decree to make man, place him upon the earth, then leave him to his own uncontrolled guidance. Instead, He fixed all the circumstances in the lot of individuals, and all the particulars which comprise the history of the human race from commencement to close. He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but He settled the application of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our heads. We may learn what is the extent of the divine decrees from the dispensations of providence in which they are executed. The care of Providence reaches to the most insignificant creatures, and the most minute events—the death of a sparrow, the fall of a hair.

Let us now consider some of the properties of the divine decrees. First, they are eternal. To suppose any of them to be made in time, is to suppose that some new occasion has occurred, some unforeseen event or combination of circumstances has arisen, which has induced the Most High to form a new resolution. This would argue that the knowledge of the Deity is limited, and that He grows wiser in the progress of time—which would be horrible blasphemy. No man who believes that the divine understanding is infinite, comprehending the past, the present, and the future, will ever assent to the erroneous doctrine of temporal decrees. God is not ignorant of future events which will be executed by human volitions; He has foretold them in innumerable instances, and prophecy is but the manifestation of His eternal prescience. Scripture affirms that believers were chosen in Christ before the world began (Eph. 1:4), yes, that grace was "given" to them then (2 Tim. 1:19).

Second, the decrees of God are wise. Wisdom is shown in the selection of the best possible ends and the fittest means to accomplish them. That this character belongs to the decrees of God is evident from what we know of them. They are disclosed to us by their execution, and every proof of wisdom in the works of God is a proof of the wisdom of the plan, in conformity to which they are performed. As the psalmist declared, "O LORD how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all" (Ps. 104:24). It is indeed but a very small part of them which falls under our observation, yet, we ought to proceed here as we do in other cases, and judge of the whole by the specimen, of what is unknown by what is known. He who sees the workings of admirable skill in the parts of a machine which he has an opportunity to examine is naturally led to believe that the other parts are equally admirable. In like manner should we satisfy our minds as to God's works when doubts obtrude themselves upon us, and repel the objections which may be suggested by something we cannot reconcile to our notions of what is good and wise. When we reach the bounds of the finite and gaze toward the mysterious realm of the infinite, let us exclaim, "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33).

Third, they are free. "Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?" (Isa. 40:13-14). God was alone when He made His decrees, and His determinations were influenced by no external cause. He was free to decree or not to decree, and to decree one thing and not another. This liberty we must ascribe to Him who is supreme, independent, and sovereign in all His doings.

Fourth, they are absolute and unconditional. The execution of them is not suspended upon any condition which may, or may not be, performed. In every instance where God has decreed an end, He has also decreed every means to that end. The One who decreed the salvation of His elect also decreed to work faith in them (2 Thess. 2:13). "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure" (Isa. 46:10); but that could not be, if His counsel depended upon a condition which might not be performed. But God "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Side by side with the immutability and invincibility of God's decrees, Scripture plainly teaches that man is a responsible creature and answerable for his actions. If our thoughts are formed from God's Word, the maintenance of the one will not lead to the denial of the other. That there is a real difficulty in defining where the one ends and the other begins is freely granted. This is always the case where there is a conjunction of the divine and the human. Real prayer is composed by the Spirit, yet it is also the cry of a human heart. The Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, yet they were written by men who were something more than machines in the hand of the Spirit. Christ is both God and man. He is omniscient, yet "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:52). He is almighty, yet was "crucified through weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4). He is the Prince of life, yet He died. High mysteries all—yet faith receives them unquestioningly.

It has been pointed out often in the past that every objection against the eternal decrees of God applies with equal force against His eternal foreknowledge. Jonathan Edwards said:

Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God, own that He knows all things beforehand. Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He either doth approve of them or doth not approve of them; that is, He either is willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. But to will that they should be is to decree them.

Finally, attempt to assume and then contemplate the opposite. To deny the divine decrees would be to predicate a world and all its concerns regulated by undesigned chance or blind fate. Then what peace, what assurance, what comfort would there be for our poor hearts and minds? What refuge would there be to fly to in the hour of trial? None at all. There would be nothing better than the black darkness and abject horror of atheism. How thankful we should be that everything is determined by infinite wisdom and goodness! What praise and gratitude are due unto God for His divine decrees. Because of them, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Well may we exclaim, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

### **3. The Knowledge of God**

God Is Omniscient. He knows everything; everything possible, everything actual; all events, all creatures, of the past, the present, and the future. He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in heaven, in earth, and in hell. "He knoweth what is in the darkness" (Dan. 2:22). Nothing escapes His notice, nothing can be hidden from Him, nothing is forgotten by Him. Well may we say with the psalmist, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6). His knowledge is perfect. He never errs, never changes, never overlooks anything. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13). Such is the God with whom we "have to do"!

"Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether" (Ps. 139:2-4). What a wondrous Being is the God of Scripture! Each of His glorious attributes should render Him honorable in our esteem. In apprehension of His omniscience we ought to bow in adoration before Him. Yet how little do we meditate upon this divine perfection! Is it because the very thought of it fills us with uneasiness?

How solemn is this fact: nothing can be concealed from God! "For I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them" (Ezek. 11:5). Though He be invisible to us, we are not so to Him. Neither the darkness of night, the closest curtains, nor the deepest dungeon can hide the sinner from the eyes of Omniscience. The trees of the garden were not able to conceal our first parents. No human eye beheld Cain murder his brother, but his Maker witnessed his crime. Sarah might laugh derisively in the seclusion of her tent, yet Jehovah heard it. Achan stole a wedge of gold and carefully hid it in the earth, but God brought it to light. David took great pains to cover up his wickedness, but the all-seeing God sent one of His servants to say to him, "Thou art the man!" To writer and reader also is said, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23).

Men would strip Deity of His omniscience if they could—what a proof that "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). The wicked do as naturally hate this divine perfection as much as they are naturally compelled to acknowledge it. They wish there might be no Witness of their sins, no Searcher of their hearts, no Judge of their deeds. They seek to banish such a God from their thoughts: "They consider not in their hearts

that I remember all their wickedness" (Hosea 7:2). How solemn is Psalm 90:8. Good reason has every Christ-rejecter for trembling before it. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

But to the believer, the fact of God's omniscience is a truth fraught with much comfort. In times of perplexity he says with Job, "But he knoweth the way that I take" (Job 23:10). It may be profoundly mysterious to me, quite incomprehensible to my friends, but "he knoweth"! In times of weariness and weakness believers assure themselves "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). In times of doubt and suspicion they appeal to this very attribute, saying "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Ps. 139:23-24). In times of sad failure, when our actions have belied our hearts, when our deeds have repudiated our devotion, and the searching question comes to us, "Lovest thou Me?"; we say, as Peter did, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee" (John 21:17).

Here is encouragement to prayer. There is no cause to fear that the petitions of the righteous will not be heard, or that their tears will escape the notice of God, since He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is no danger of the individual saint being overlooked amidst the multitude of supplicants who hourly present their petitions, for an infinite Mind is as capable of paying the same attention to millions as if only one were seeking its attention. So, too, the lack of appropriate language, the inability to give expression to the deepest longing of the soul, will not jeopardize our prayers, for "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

"Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). God knows whatsoever has happened in the past in every part of His vast domains, and He is thoroughly acquainted with everything that now transpires throughout the entire universe. But He also is perfectly cognizant with every event, from the least to the greatest, that will happen in ages to come. God's knowledge of the future is as complete as His knowledge of the past and the present, because the future depends entirely upon Himself. Were it in anywise possible for something to occur apart from either the direct agency or permission of God, then that something would be independent of Him, and He would at once cease to be supreme.

Now the divine knowledge of the future is not a mere abstraction, but something inseparably connected with and accompanied by His purpose. God designed whatsoever shall yet be, and what He has designed must be effected. As His most sure Word affirms, "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand" (Dan. 4:35). Again, "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand" (Prov. 19:21). The wisdom and power of God being alike infinite, the accomplishment of whatever He hath purposed is absolutely guaranteed. It is no more possible for the divine counsels to fail in their execution than it would be for the thrice-holy God to lie.

Nothing relating to the future is uncertain so far as the actualization of God's counsels are concerned. None of His decrees are left contingent either upon creatures or secondary causes. There is no future event which is only a mere possibility, that is, something which may or may not come to pass, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning" (Acts 15:18). Whatever God has decreed is inexorably certain, for He is without variableness, or shadow of turning (James 1:17). Therefore we are told at the very beginning of that book which unveils to us so much of the future, "things which must shortly come: to pass" (Rev. 1:1).

The perfect knowledge of God is exemplified and illustrated in every prophecy recorded in His Word. In the Old Testament, scores of predictions concerning the history of Israel were fulfilled to their minutest detail, centuries after they were made. Scores more foretold the earthly career of Christ, and they, too, were accomplished literally and perfectly. Such prophecies could only have been given by One who knew the end from the beginning, whose knowledge rested upon the unconditional certainty of the accomplishment of everything foretold. In like manner, both Old and New Testaments contain many other announcements yet future. They, too, "must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44), because they were foretold by Him who decreed them.

It should, however, be pointed out that neither God's knowledge nor His cognition of the future, considered simply in themselves, are causative. Nothing has ever come to pass, or ever will, merely because God knew it. The cause of all things is the will of God. The man who really believes the Scriptures knows beforehand that the seasons will continue to follow each other with unfailing regularity to the end of earth's history (Gen. 8:22), yet his knowledge is not the cause of their succession. So God's knowledge does not arise from things because they are or will be, but because He has ordained them to be. God knew and foretold the crucifixion of

His Son many hundreds of years before He became incarnate, and this, because in the Divine purpose, He was a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: hence we read of His being "delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23).

A word or two of application. The infinite knowledge of God should fill us with amazement. How far exalted above the wisest man is the Lord! None of us knows what a day may bring forth, but all futurity is open to His omniscient gaze. The infinite knowledge of God ought to fill us with holy awe. Nothing we do, say, or even think, escapes the knowledge of Him with whom we have to do: "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). What a curb this would be to us, if we meditated upon it more frequently! Instead of acting recklessly, we should say with Hagar, "Thou God seest me" (Gen. 16:13). The apprehension of God's infinite knowledge should fill the Christian with adoration. The whole of my life stood open to His view from the beginning. He foresaw my every fall, my every sin, my every backsliding; yet, He fixed His heart upon me. Oh, how the realization of this should bow me in wonder and worship before Him!

#### **4. The Foreknowledge of God**

What Controversies have been engendered by this subject in the past! But what truth of Holy Scripture is there which has not been the occasion of theological and ecclesiastical battles? The deity of Christ, His virgin birth, His atoning death, His second advent; the believer's justification, sanctification, security; the church, its organization, officers, discipline; baptism, the Lord's Supper, and a score of other precious truths might be mentioned. Yet, the controversies which have been waged over them did not close the mouths of God's faithful servants. Why, then, should we avoid the vexing question of God's foreknowledge, because some will charge us with fomenting strife? Let others contend if they will, our duty is to bear witness according to the light given us.

There are two things concerning the foreknowledge of God about which many are in ignorance: the meaning of the term, and its Scriptural scope. Because this ignorance is so widespread, it is easy for preachers and teachers to palm off perversions of this subject, even upon the people of God. There is only one safeguard against error, that is to be established in the faith. For that there has to be prayerful, diligent study, and a receiving with meekness the engrafted Word of God. Only then are we fortified against the attacks of those who assail us. There are those who misuse this very truth to discredit and deny the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. Just as higher critics repudiate the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and evolutionists, the work of God in creation, so some pseudo Bible teachers pervert His foreknowledge to set aside His unconditional election unto eternal life.

When the blessed subject of divine foreordination is expounded, when God's eternal choice of certain ones to be conformed to the image of His Son is set forth, the enemy sends along someone to argue that election is based upon the foreknowledge of God. This foreknowledge is interpreted to mean that God foresaw certain ones who would be more pliable than others and they would respond more readily to the strivings of the Spirit. So, because God knew they would believe, He predestinated them unto salvation. But such logic is radically wrong. It repudiates the truth of total depravity, for it argues that there is something good in some men. It takes away the independency of God, for it makes His decrees rest upon what He discovers in the creature.

It completely turns things upside down, for in saying God foresaw certain sinners who would believe in Christ, and because of this He predestinated them unto salvation, is the very reverse of the truth. Scripture affirms that God, in His sovereignty, singled out certain ones to be recipients of His distinguishing favors (Acts 13:48); therefore He determined to bestow upon them the gift of faith. False theology makes God's foreknowledge of our believing the cause of His election to salvation. However, God's election is the cause, and our believing in Christ the effect.

Before we proceed further with this much misunderstood theme, let us define our terms. What is meant by "foreknowledge"? "To know beforehand" is the ready reply of many. But we must not jump to conclusions, nor must we turn to Webster's dictionary as the final court of appeal, for it is not a matter of the etymology of the term employed. What we need is to find out how the word is used in Scripture. The Holy Spirit's usage of an expression always defines its meaning and scope. Failure to apply this simple rule is responsible for so much confusion and error. So many people assume they already know the significance of a certain word used in Scripture, then they are too dilatory to test their assumptions with a concordance. Let us amplify.

Take the word "flesh." Its meaning appears so obvious that many would regard it as a waste of time to look up its various connections in Scripture. It is hastily assumed that the word is synonymous with the physical body, so no inquiry is made. But, in fact, flesh in Scripture frequently includes far more than what is corporeal; all that is embraced by the term can only be ascertained by a diligent comparison of every occurrence of it and by a study of each separate context.

Take the word "world." The average Bible reader imagines this word is the equivalent for the human race, and consequently, many passages where the term is found are wrongly interpreted. Take the word "immortality." Surely it requires no study! Obviously it has reference to the indestructibility of the soul. Ah, but it is wrong to assume anything where the Word of God is concerned. If the reader will take the trouble to carefully examine each passage where "mortal" and "immortal" are found, it will be seen these words are never applied to the soul, but always to the body.

Now what has just been said on "flesh," the "world," "immortality," applies with equal force to the terms "know" and "foreknow." Instead of imagining that these words signify no more than a simple cognition, carefully weigh the different passages in which they occur. The word "foreknowledge" is not found in the Old Testament. But "know" occurs there frequently. When that term is used in connection with God, it often signifies to regard with favor, denoting not mere cognition but an affection for the object in view. "I know thee by name" (Ex. 33:17). "Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you" (Deut. 9:24). "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (Jer. 1:5). "They have made princes, and I knew not" (Hosea 8:4). "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). In these passages "knew" signifies either "loved" or "appointed."

In like manner, the word "know" is frequently used in the New Testament, in the same sense as in the Old. "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23). "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine" (John 10:14). "If any man love God, the same is known of him" (1 Cor. 8:3). "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Tim. 2:19).

Now the word "foreknowledge" as it is used in the New Testament is less ambiguous than in its simple form "to know." If you carefully study every passage in which it occurs, you will discover that it is a moot point whether it ever has reference to the mere perception of events yet to take place. The fact is that foreknowledge is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always refers to persons. It is persons God is said to "foreknow," not the actions of those persons. To prove this we will quote each passage where this expression is found.

The first occurs in Acts 2:23: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Careful attention to the wording of this verse shows that the apostle was not speaking of God's foreknowledge of the act of the crucifixion, but of the Person crucified: "Him (Christ) being delivered by."

The second is Romans 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called." Weigh well the pronoun used here. It is not what He did foreknow, but whom He did. It is not the surrendering of their wills nor the believing of their hearts, but the persons themselves, which is in view.

"God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Rom. 11:2). Once more the plain reference is to persons, and to persons only.

The last mention is in 1 Peter 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Who are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father?" The previous verse tells us the reference is to the "strangers scattered," i.e., the diaspora, the dispersion, the believing Jews. Thus, the reference is to persons, and not to their foreseen acts.

Now in view of these passages (and there are no more) what scriptural ground is there for anyone to say God "foreknew" the acts of certain ones, i.e., their "repenting and believing," and that because of those acts He elected them unto salvation? The answer is, None whatever. Scripture never speaks of repentance and faith as being foreseen or foreknown by God. Truly, He did know from all eternity that certain ones would repent and

believe, yet this is not what Scripture refers to as the object of God's foreknowledge. The word uniformly refers to God's foreknowing persons; then let us "hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13).

Another thing we want to call particular attention to is that the first two passages quoted above show plainly and teach implicitly that God's foreknowledge is not causative, that instead, something else lies behind, precedes it—something that is His own sovereign decree. Christ was "delivered by the (1) determinate counsel and (2) foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). His counsel or decree was the ground of His foreknowledge. So again in Romans 8:29. That verse opens with the word "for," which tells us to look back to what immediately precedes. What, then, does the previous verse say? This, "all things work together for good to them . . . who are the called according to His purpose." Thus God's "foreknowledge" is based upon His "purpose" or decree (see Psalm 2:7).

God foreknows what will be because He has decreed it. It is therefore a reverse order of Scripture, putting the cart before the horse, to affirm that God elects because He foreknows people. The truth is, He foreknows because He has elected. This removes the cause of election from outside the creature, and places it in God's own sovereign will. God purposed in Himself to elect a certain people, not because of anything good in them or from them, either actual or foreseen, but solely out of His own pleasure.

Why He chose the ones He did, we do not know. We can only say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." The plain truth of Romans 8:29 is that God, before the foundation of the world, singled out certain sinners and appointed them unto salvation (2 Thess. 2:13). This is clear from the concluding words of the verse: "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of His son." God did not predestinate those whom He foreknew were conformed. On the contrary, those whom He foreknew (i.e., loved and elected) He predestinated "to be conformed." Their conformity to Christ is not the cause, but the effect of God's foreknowledge and predestination.

God did not elect any sinner because He foresaw that he would believe, for the simple but sufficient reason that no sinner ever believes until God gives him faith; just as no man sees until God gives him sight. Sight is God's gift, seeing is the consequence of my using His gift. So faith is God's gift (Eph. 2:8-9), believing is the consequence of my using His gift. If it were true that God had elected certain ones to be saved because in due time they would believe, then that would make believing a meritorious act. In that event the saved sinner would have ground for "boasting," which Scripture emphatically denies (Eph. 2:9).

Surely God's Word is plain enough in teaching that believing is not a meritorious act. It affirms that Christians are a people "which had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). If, then, they have believed "through grace," there is absolutely nothing meritorious about believing; if nothing meritorious, it could not be the ground or cause which moved God to choose them. No! God's choice proceeds not from anything in us, or anything from us, but solely from His own sovereign pleasure. Once more, we read of "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). There it is, plain enough; election itself is of grace, and grace is unmerited favor, something for which we had no claim upon God whatsoever.

It is highly important for us to have clear and scriptural views of the foreknowledge of God. Erroneous conceptions about it lead inevitably to thoughts most dishonoring to Him. The popular idea of divine foreknowledge is altogether inadequate. God not only knew the end from the beginning, but also He planned, fixed, predestinated everything from the beginning. And, as cause stands to effect, so God's purpose is the ground of His prescience. If then the reader is a real Christian, he is so because God chose him in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4); and chose not because He foresaw you would believe, but simply because it pleased Him to choose; chose you notwithstanding your natural unbelief. This being so, all glory and praise belongs alone to Him. You have no ground for taking any credit to yourself. You have "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27), and that, because your very election was "of grace" (Rom. 11:5).

## **5. The Supremacy of God**

In One Of His Letters to Erasmus, Luther said, "Your thoughts of God are too human." Probably that renowned scholar resented such a rebuke, the more so, since it proceeded from a miner's son. Nevertheless, it was thoroughly deserved. We, too, prefer the same charge against the vast majority of the preachers of our day, and against those who, instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, lazily accept their teachings. The most dishonoring conceptions of the rule and reign of the Almighty are now held almost everywhere. To countless thousands, even professing Christians, the God of Scripture is quite unknown.

Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (Ps. 50:21). Such must now be His indictment against apostate Christendom. Men imagine the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than by principle. They suppose His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that Satan can thwart His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man's free will and reduce him to a machine. They lower the all- efficacious atonement, which redeems everyone for whom it was made, to a mere remedy, which sin-sick souls may use if they feel so disposed. They lessen the strength of the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an offer of the Gospel which sinners may accept or reject as they please.

The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds. In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A god whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to deity, and far from being a fit object of worship, merits nothing but contempt.

The supremacy of the true and living God might well be argued from the infinite distance which separates the mightiest creatures from the Creator. He is the Potter, they are but the clay in His hands, to be molded into vessels of honor or to be dashed into pieces (Ps. 2:9) as He pleases. Were all the denizens of heaven and all the inhabitants of earth to combine in open revolt against Him, it would cause Him no uneasiness. It would have less effect upon His eternal, unassailable throne than the spray of Mediterranean's waves has upon the towering rocks of Gibraltar. So puerile and powerless is the creature to affect the Most High, Scripture tells us that when the Gentile heads unite with apostate Israel to defy Jehovah and His Christ, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh" (Ps. 2:4).

The absolute and universal supremacy of God is plainly affirmed in many Scriptures. "Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all . . . And thou reignest over all"

(1 Chron. 29:11-12). Note "reignest" now, not "will do so in the Millennium." "O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none [not even the Devil himself] is able to withstand thee"? (2 Chron. 20:6). Before Him presidents and popes, kings and emperors, are less than grasshoppers.

"But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 23:13). My reader, the God of Scripture is no make-believe monarch, no imaginary sovereign, but King of kings, and Lord of lords. "I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought of thine can be hindered" (Job 42:2); or, another translator, "no purpose of thine can be frustrated." All that He has designed, He does. All that He has decreed, He perfects. All that He has promised, He performs. "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). Why has He? Because "there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD" (Prov. 21:30).

God's supremacy over the works of His hands is vividly depicted in Scripture. Inanimate matter, irrational creatures, all perform their Maker's bidding. At His pleasure, the Red Sea divided and its waters stood up as walls (Ex. 14); the earth opened her mouth, and guilty rebels went down alive into the pit (Num. 14). When He so ordered, the sun stood still (Josh. 10); and on another occasion went backward ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz. To exemplify His supremacy, He made ravens carry food to Elijah (1 Kings 17); iron to float on the waters (2 Kings 6:5); lions to be tame when Daniel was cast into their den; fire to burn not when three Hebrews were flung into its flames. Thus, "Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6).

God's supremacy is also demonstrated in His perfect rule over the wills of men. Ponder carefully Exodus 34:24. Three times in the year all the males of Israel were required to leave their homes and go up to Jerusalem. They lived in the midst of hostile people, who hated them for having appropriated their lands. What, then, was to hinder the Canaanites from seizing the opportunity, during the absence of the men, to enslave the women and children and take possession of their farms? If the hand of the Almighty was not upon the wills even of wicked men, how could He make this promise beforehand, that none should so much as "desire" their lands? "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1).

But, some may object, do we not read again and again in Scripture how men defied God, resisted His will, broke His commandments, disregarded His warnings, and turned a deaf ear to all his exhortations? Certainly we do. Does this nullify all we have said? If so, then plainly the Bible contradicts itself. But that cannot be. What the objector refers to is simply the wickedness of men against the external word of God. We have mentioned what God has purposed in Himself. The rule of conduct He has given us to walk by is perfectly fulfilled by none of us. His own eternal counsels are accomplished to their minutest details.

The absolute and universal supremacy of God is affirmed with equal positiveness in the New Testament. We are told that God "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11)—the Greek for "worketh" means "to work effectually". For this reason we read, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). Men may boast they are free agents, with a will of their own, and are at liberty to do as they please. But Scripture says to those who boast, "we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell . . . ye ought to say, If the Lord will" (Jam. 4:13, 15).

Here then is a sure resting-place for the heart. Our lives are neither the product of blind fate nor the result of capricious chance. Every detail of them was ordained from all eternity and is now ordered by the living, reigning God. Not a hair of our heads can be touched without His permission. "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the LORD directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9). What assurance, what strength, what comfort this should give the real Christian! "My times are in thy hand" (Ps. 31:15). Then let me "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him" (Ps. 37:7).

## **6. The Sovereignty of God**

The Sovereignty Of God may be defined as the exercise of His supremacy (see preceding chapter). Infinitely elevated above the highest creature, He is the Most High, Lord of heaven and earth; subject to none, influenced by none, absolutely independent. God does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. None can thwart Him, none can hinder Him. So His own Word expressly declares: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10); "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand" (Dan. 4:35). Divine sovereignty means that God is God in fact, as well as in name, that He is on the throne of the universe, directing all things, working all things "after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

Rightly did the late Charles Haddon Spurgeon say in his sermon on Matthew 20:15:

There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne.

On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties.

They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the evermoving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth, and we proclaim an enthroned God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as He thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.

"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places" (Ps. 135:6). Such is the mighty Potentate revealed in Holy Writ: unrivalled in majesty, unlimited in power, unaffected by anything outside Himself. But we are living in a day when even the most orthodox seem afraid to admit the proper Godhood of God. They say that to press the sovereignty of God excludes human responsibility; whereas human responsibility is based upon divine sovereignty, and is the product of it.

"But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3). He sovereignly chose to place each of His creatures on that particular footing which seemed good in His sight. He created angels; some He placed on a conditional footing, others He gave an immutable standing before Him (1 Tim. 5:21), making Christ their head (Col. 2:10). Let it not be overlooked that the angels which sinned (2 Pet. 2:5), were as much His creatures as the angels that sinned not. Yet God foresaw they would fall. Nevertheless He placed them on a mutable, creature, conditional footing, and suffered them to fall, though He was not the author of their sin.

Too, God sovereignly placed Adam in the Garden of Eden upon a conditional footing. Had He so pleased, He could have placed him upon an unconditional footing; He could have placed him on a footing as firm as that occupied by the unfallen angels; He could have placed him upon a footing as sure and as immutable as that which His saints have in Christ. Instead, He chose to set him in Eden on the basis of creature responsibility, so that he stood or fell according to how he measured up or failed to measure up to his responsibility—obedience to his Maker. Adam stood accountable to God by the Law which his Creator had given him. Here was responsibility, unimpaired responsibility, tested under the most favorable conditions.

God did not place Adam upon a footing of conditional, creature-responsibility, because it was right He should so place him. No, it was right because God did it. God did not even give creatures being because it was right for Him to do so, i.e., because He was under any obligations to create; but it was right because He did so. God is sovereign. His will is supreme. So far from God being under any law of right, He is a law unto Himself, so that whatever He does is right. Woe be to the rebel that calls His sovereignty into question: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" (Isa. 45:9).

Again, the Lord sovereignly placed Israel upon a conditional footing. Exodus 19, 20, and 24 afford a full proof of this. They were placed under a covenant of works. God gave them certain laws. National blessing for them depended upon their observance of His statutes. But Israel was stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart. They rebelled against Jehovah, forsook His Law, turned unto false gods, apostatized. In consequence, divine judgment fell upon them, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies, dispersed abroad throughout the earth, and remain under the heavy frown of God's displeasure to this day.

It was God in the exercise of His sovereignty that placed Satan and his angels, Adam and Israel in their respective responsible positions. But so far from His sovereignty taking away responsibility from the creature, it was by the exercise of it that He placed them on this conditional footing, under such responsibilities as He thought proper. By virtue of this sovereignty, He is seen to be God over all. Thus, there is perfect harmony between the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of the creature. Many have more foolishly said that it is quite impossible to show where divine sovereignty ends and creature accountability begins. Here is where creature responsibility begins: in the sovereign ordination of the Creator. As to His sovereignty, there is not, and never will be, any end to it!

Let us see further proofs that the responsibility of the creature is based upon God's sovereignty. How many things are recorded in Scripture which were right because God commanded them—which would not have been right had He not so commanded! What right had Adam to eat of the trees of the garden? The permission of his Maker (Gen. 2:16); without such, he would have been a thief! What right had Israel to borrow of the Egyptians' jewels and raiment (Ex. 12:35)? None, unless Jehovah had authorized it (Ex. 3:22). What right had Israel to slay so many lambs for sacrifice? None, except that God commanded it. What right had Israel to kill off all the Canaanites? None, only as Jehovah had bidden them. What right has the husband to require submission from his wife? None, unless God had appointed it. So we might go on. Human responsibility is based on divine sovereignty.

One more example of the exercise of God's absolute sovereignty: God placed His elect upon a different footing than Adam or Israel. He placed them upon an unconditional footing. In the Everlasting Covenant Jesus Christ was appointed their Head, took their responsibilities upon Himself, and wrought out a righteousness for them which is perfect, indefeasible, eternal. Christ was placed upon a conditional footing, for He was "made under

the law, to redeem them that were under the law," but with this infinite difference: the others failed, He did not, and could not. Who placed Christ upon that conditional footing? The Triune God. It was sovereign will that appointed Him, sovereign love that sent Him, sovereign authority that assigned His work.

Certain conditions were set before the Mediator. He was to be made in the likeness of sin's flesh; He was to magnify the Law and make it honorable; He was to bear all the sins of all God's people in His own body on the tree; He was to make full atonement for them; He was to endure the outpoured wrath of God; He was to die and be buried. On the fulfillment of those conditions He was promised a reward (Isa. 53:10-12). He was to be the firstborn among many brethren; He was to have a people who should share His glory. Blessed be His name forever, He fulfilled those conditions.

Because He did so, the Father stands pledged, on solemn oath, to preserve through time and bless throughout eternity every one of those for whom His incarnate Son mediated. Because He took their place, they now share His. His righteousness is theirs. His standing before God is theirs, His life is theirs. There is not a single condition for them to meet, not a single responsibility for them to discharge in order to attain their eternal bliss. "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14).

Here then is the sovereignty of God openly displayed before all, displayed in the different ways in which He has dealt with His creatures. Part of the angels, Adam, Israel, were placed upon a conditional footing. Continued blessing was dependent upon their obedience and fidelity to God. But in sharp contrast, the "little flock" (Luke 12:32) have been given an unconditional, an immutable standing in God's covenant, God's counsels, God's Son; their blessing is dependent upon what Christ did for them. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. 2:19). The foundation on which God's elect stand is a perfect one; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it (Eccl. 3:14). Here, then, is the highest and grandest display of the absolute sovereignty of God. He has "mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will be hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18).

## **7. The Immutability of God**

This is One of the divine perfections which is not sufficiently pondered. It is one of the excellencies of the Creator which distinguishes Him from all His creatures. God is perpetually the same: subject to no change in His being, attributes, or determinations. Therefore God is compared to a rock (Deut. 32:4) which remains immovable, when the entire ocean surrounding it is continually in a fluctuating state. Even so, though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. Because God has no beginning and no ending, He can know no change. He is everlastingly "the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

First, God is immutable in His essence. His nature and being are infinite, and so, subject to no mutations. There never was a time when He was not; there never will come a time when He shall cease to be. God has neither evolved, grown, nor improved. All that He is today, He has ever been, and ever will be. "I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6), is His own unqualified affirmation. He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect; being perfect, He cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside Himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. He is perpetually the same. He only can say, "I AM THAT I AM" (Ex. 3:14). He is altogether uninfluenced by the flight of time. There is no wrinkle upon the brow of eternity. Therefore His power can never diminish, nor His glory ever fade.

Second, God is immutable in His attributes. Whatever the attributes of God were before the universe was called into existence, they are precisely the same now, and will remain so forever. Necessarily so; for they are the very perfections, the essential qualities of His being. *Semper idem* (always the same) is written across every one of them. His power is unabated, His wisdom undiminished, His holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than deity can cease to be. His veracity is immutable, for His Word is "forever settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). His love is eternal: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3) and, "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). His mercy ceases not, for it is "everlasting" (Ps. 100:5).

Third, God is immutable in His counsel, His will never varies. Perhaps some are ready to object when we read "It repented the LORD that He had made man" (Gen. 6:6). Our first reply is, Do the Scriptures contradict themselves? No, that cannot be. Numbers 23:19 is plain enough: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." The explanation is simple. When speaking of Himself, God frequently

accommodates His language to our limited capacities. He describes Himself as clothed with bodily members, as eyes, ears, hands.

He speaks of Himself as "waking" (Ps. 78:65), as "rising early" (Jer. 7:13); yet He neither slumbers nor sleeps. When He institutes a change in His dealings with men, He describes His course of conduct as "repenting." Yes, God is immutable in His counsel. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). It must be so, for "He is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 23:13).

Change and decay in all around we see,  
May He who changeth not abide with thee.

God's purpose never alters. One of two things causes a man to change his mind and reverse his plans: want of foresight to anticipate everything, or lack of power to execute them. But as God is both omniscient and omnipotent, there is never any need for Him to revise His decrees. No, "The counsel of the LORD standeth forever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (Ps. 33:11). Therefore we read of, "the immutability of his counsel" (Heb. 6:17).

Here we may perceive the infinite distance which separates the highest creature from the Creator. Creaturehood and mutability are correlative terms. If the creature was not mutable by nature, it would not be a creature; it would be God. By nature we tend to nothing, as we came from nothing. Nothing stays our annihilation but the will and sustaining power of God. None can sustain himself a single moment. We are entirely dependent on the Creator for every breath we draw. We gladly own with the psalmist, "thou holdeth our soul in life" (Ps. 66:9). The realization of this ought to make us lie down under a sense of our own nothingness in the presence of Him "in whom we live and move, and have our being."

As fallen creatures we are not only mutable, but also everything in us is opposed to God. As such we are "wandering stars" (Jude 13), out of our proper orbit. The wicked are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isa. 57:20). Fallen man is inconstant. The words of Jacob concerning Reuben apply with full force to all of Adam's descendants, "unstable as water" (Gen. 49:4). Thus it is not only a mark of piety, but also the part of wisdom to heed that injunction, "cease ye from man" (Isa. 2:22). No human being is to be depended on. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help" (Ps. 146:3). If I disobey God, then I deserve to be deceived and disappointed by my fellows. People who like you today, may hate you tomorrow. The multitude who cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David," speedily changed to "Away with him, crucify him."

Here is solid comfort. Human nature cannot be relied upon; but God can! However unstable I may be, however fickle my friends may prove, God changes not. If He varied as we do, if He willed one thing today and another tomorrow, if He were controlled by caprice, who could confide in Him? But He is ever the same. His purpose is fixed, His will stable, His word is sure. Here then is a rock on which we may fix our feet, while the mighty torrent sweeps away everything around us. The permanence of God's character guarantees the fulfillment of His promises: "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).

Here is encouragement to prayer. "What comfort would it be to pray to a god that, like the chameleon, changed color every moment? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that was so mutable as to grant a petition one day, and deny it another?" (S. Charnock, 1670). Should someone ask what is the use of praying to One whose will is already fixed, we answer, because He requires it. What blessings has God promised without our seeking them? "If we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (1 John 5:14). He has willed everything that is for His child's good. To ask for anything contrary to His will is not prayer, but rank rebellion.

Here is terror for the wicked. Those who defy Him, break His laws, have no concern for His glory, but live their lives as though He did not exist, must not suppose that, when at the last they shall cry to Him for mercy, He will alter His will, revoke His word, and rescind His awful threatenings. No, He has declared, "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezek. 8:18). God will not deny Himself to gratify their lusts. God is holy, unchangingly so. Therefore God hates sin, eternally hates it. Hence the eternity of the punishment of all who die in their sins.

The divine immutability, like the cloud which interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptian army, has a dark as well as a light side. It insures the execution of His threatenings, as well as the performance of His promises; and destroys the hope which the guilty fondly cherish, that He will be all lenity to His frail and erring creatures, and that they will be much more lightly dealt with than the declarations of His own Word would lead us to expect. We oppose to these deceitful and presumptuous speculations the solemn truth, that God is unchanging in veracity and purpose, in faithfulness and justice (J. Dick, 1850).

### 8. The Holiness of God

"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? for thou only art holy" (Rev. 15:4). He only is independently, infinitely, immutably holy. In Scripture, He is frequently styled "The Holy One." He is so because the sum of all moral excellency is found in Him. He is absolute purity, unsullied even by the shadow of sin. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Holiness is the very excellency of the divine nature; the great God is "glorious in holiness" (Ex. 15:11). Therefore we read, "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13).

As God's power is the opposite of the native weakness of the creature, as His wisdom is in complete contrast from the least defect of understanding or folly, so His holiness is the very antithesis of all moral blemish or defilement. Of old God appointed singers in Israel "that should praise the beauty of holiness" (2 Chron. 20:21). "Power is God's hand or arm, omniscience His eye, mercy His bowels, eternity His duration, but holiness is His beauty" (S. Charnock). It is this, supremely, which renders Him lovely to those who are delivered from sin's dominion.

A chief emphasis is placed upon this perfection of God.

God is oftener styled Holy than Almighty, and set forth by this part of His dignity more than by any other. This is more fixed on as an epithet to His name than any other. You never find it expressed "His mighty name" or "His wise name," but His great name, and most of all, His holy name. This is the greatest title of honor; in this latter doth the majesty and venerableness of His name appear (S. Charnock).

This perfection, as none other, is solemnly celebrated before the throne of heaven, the seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). God Himself singles out this perfection, "Once have I sworn by my holiness" (Ps. 89:35). God swears by His holiness because that is a fuller expression of Himself than anything else.

Therefore we are exhorted, "Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness" (Ps. 30:4). "This may be said to be a transcendental attribute, that, as it were, runs through the rest, and casts lustre upon them. It is an attribute of attributes" (J. Howe, 1670). Thus we read of "the beauty of the LORD" (Ps. 27:4), which is none other than "the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 110:3).

As it seems to challenge an excellency above all His other perfections, so it is the glory of all the rest: as it is the glory of the Godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the Godhead; as His power is the strength of them, so His holiness is the beauty of them; as all would be weak without almightiness to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them. Should this be sullied, all the rest would lose their honor; as at the same instant the sun should lose its light, it would lose its heat, its strength, its generative and quickening virtue. As sincerity is the lustre of every grace in a Christian, so is purity the splendor of every attribute in the Godhead. His justice is a holy justice, His wisdom a holy wisdom, His power a "holy arm" (Ps. 98:1). His truth or promise a "holy promise" (Ps. 105:42). His name, which signifies all His attributes in conjunction, "is holy," (Ps. 103:1) (S. Charnock).

God's holiness is manifested in His works. "The LORD is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all his works" (Ps. 145:17). Nothing but what is excellent can proceed from Him. Holiness is the rule of all His actions. At the beginning He pronounced all that He made "very good" (Gen. 1:31), which He could not have done had there been anything imperfect or unholy in them. Man was made "upright" (Ecclesiastes 7:29), in the image and likeness of his Creator. The angels that fell were created holy, for we are told that they "kept not their first habitation" (Jude 6). Of Satan it is written, "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezek. 28:15).

God's holiness is manifested in His Law. That Law forbids sin in all of its modifications—in its most refined, as well as its grossest forms, the intent of the mind as well as the pollution of the body, the secret desire as well

as the overt act. Therefore we read, "Thy law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). Yes, "the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:8,9).

God's holiness is manifested at the cross. Wondrously, and yet most solemnly does the atonement display God's infinite holiness and abhorrence of sin. How hateful must sin be to God for Him to punish it to its utmost deserts when it was imputed to His Son!

Not all the vials of judgment that have or shall be poured out upon the wicked world, nor the flaming furnace of a sinner's conscience, nor the irreversible sentence pronounced against the rebellious demons, nor the groans of the damned creatures, give such a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, as the wrath of God let loose upon His Son. Never did Divine holiness appear more beautiful and lovely than at the time our Savior's countenance was most marred in the midst of His dying groans. This Himself acknowledges in Psalm 22. When God had turned His smiling face from Him, and thrust His sharp knife into His heart, which forced that terrible cry from Him, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He adores this perfection—"Thou art holy," (v. 3) (S. Charnock).

Because God is holy He hates all sin. He loves everything which is in conformity to His laws, and loathes everything contrary to them. His Word plainly declares, "The froward is an abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 3:32). And again, "The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 15:26). It follows, therefore, that He must necessarily punish sin. Sin can no more exist without demanding His punishment than it can without requiring His hatred of it. God has often forgiven sinners, but He never forgives sin; the sinner is only forgiven on the ground of Another having borne his punishment; for "without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Therefore we are told "The Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies" (Nah. 1:2). For one sin God banished our first parents from Eden; for one sin all the posterity of Canaan fell under a curse which remains over them to this day; for one sin Moses was excluded from the promised land; Elisha's servant smitten with leprosy; Ananias and Sapphira were cut off from the land of the living.

Here we find proof for the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. The unregenerate do not really believe in the holiness of God. Their concept of His character is altogether one-sided. They fondly hope that His mercy will override everything else. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself" (Ps. 50:21), is God's charge against them. They think only of a god patterned after their own evil hearts, hence their continuance in a course of mad folly. Such is the holiness ascribed to the divine nature and character in Scripture that it clearly demonstrates their superhuman origin.

The character attributed to the gods of the ancients and of modern heathendom are the very reverse of that immaculate purity which pertains to the true God. An ineffably holy God, who has the utmost abhorrence of all sin, was never invented by any of Adam's fallen descendants! The fact is that nothing reveals more of the terrible depravity of man's heart and his enmity against the living God than to have set before him One who is infinitely and immutably holy. His own idea of sin is practically limited to what the world calls crime. Anything short of that, man palliates as "defects," "mistakes," "infirmities." And even where sin is owned at all, man makes excuses and extenuations for it.

The God which the vast majority of professing Christians love, is looked upon very much like an indulgent old man, who himself has no relish for folly, but leniently winks at the indiscretions of youth. But the Word says, "Thou hatest all workers of iniquity" (Ps. 5:5). And again, "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). But men refuse to believe in this God, and gnash their teeth when His hatred of sin is faithfully pressed upon their attention. No, sinful man was no more likely to devise a holy God than to create the lake of fire in which he will be tormented forever and ever.

Because God is holy, acceptance with Him on the ground of creature doings is utterly impossible. A fallen creature could sooner create a world than produce that which would meet the approval of infinite Purity. Can darkness dwell with light? Can the Immaculate One take pleasure in "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6)? The best that sinful man brings forth is defiled. A corrupt tree cannot bear good fruit. God would deny Himself, vilify His perfections, were He to account as righteous and holy that which is not so in itself; and nothing is so which has the least stain upon it contrary to the nature of God. But that which His holiness demanded His grace has provided in Christ Jesus our Lord. Every poor sinner who has fled to Him for refuge stands, "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

Because God is holy, the utmost reverence becomes our approaches to Him. "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all about him" (Ps. 89:7). Then, "Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; he is holy" (Ps. 99:5). Yes, "at His footstool," in the lowest posture of humility, prostrate before Him. When Moses would approach unto the burning bush, God said, "put off thy shoes from off thy feet" (Ex. 3:5). He is to be served "with fear" (Ps. 2:11). Of Israel His demand was, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. 10:3). The more our hearts are awed by His ineffable holiness, the more acceptable will be our approaches to Him.

Because God is holy, we should desire to be conformed to Him. His command is, "Be ye holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). We are not bidden to be omnipotent or omniscient as God is, but we are to be holy, and that "in all manner of deportment" (1 Pet. 1:15). "This is the prime way of honoring God. We do not so glorify God by elevated admirations, or eloquent expressions, or pompous services of Him, as when we aspire to a conversing with Him with unstained spirits, and live to Him in living like Him" (S. Charnock). Then as God alone is the source and fount of holiness, let us earnestly seek holiness from Him; let our daily prayer be that He may "sanctify us wholly; and our whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

### 9. The Power of God

WE CANNOT HAVE a right conception of God unless we think of Him as all-powerful, as well as all-wise. He who cannot do what he will and perform all his pleasure cannot be God. As God has a will to resolve what He deems good, so He has power to execute His will.

The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve . . . As holiness is the beauty of all God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all the perfections of the Divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels, if power did not step in to execute them. Without power His mercy would be but feeble pity, His promises an empty sound, His threatenings a mere scare-crow. God's power is like Himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible; it can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature (S. Charnock).

"God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God" (Ps. 62:11). "God hath spoken once"; nothing more is necessary! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His word abides forever. "God hath spoken once"; how befitting His divine majesty! We poor mortals may speak often and yet fail to be heard. He speaks but once and the thunder of His power is heard on a thousand hills.

The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightnings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen and the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils" (Ps. 18:13-15).

"God hath spoken once." Behold His unchanging authority. "For who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD?" (Ps. 89:6). "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 doest thou?" (Dan. 4:35). This was openly displayed when God became incarnate and tabernacled among men. To the leper He said, "I will, be thou clean, and immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8:3). To one who had lain in the grave four days He cried, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead came forth. The stormy wind and the angry waves hushed at a single word from Him. A legion of demons could not resist His authoritative command.

"Power belongeth unto God," and to Him alone. Not a creature in the entire universe has an atom of power save what God delegates. But God's power is not acquired, nor does it depend upon any recognition by any other authority. It belongs to Him inherently.

God's power is like Himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest of men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the omnipotent One. He sits on no buttressed throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not maintained by His courtiers, nor does it borrow its splendor from His creatures. He is Himself the great central source and Originator of all power (C. H. Spurgeon).

Not only does all creation bear witness to the great power of God, but also to His entire independency of all created things. Listen to His own challenge: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened or who laid the cornerstone thereof?" (Job 38:4-6). How completely is the pride of man laid in the dust!

Power is also used as a name of God, "the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power" (Mark 14:62), that is, at the right hand of God. God and power are so inseparable that they are reciprocated. As His essence is immense, not to be confined in place; as it is eternal, not to be measured in time; so it is almighty, not to be limited in regard of action (S. Charnock).

"Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?" (Job 26:14). Who is able to count all the monuments of His power? Even that which is displayed of His might in the visible creation is utterly beyond our powers of comprehension, still less are we able to conceive of omnipotence itself. There is infinitely more power lodged in the nature of God than is expressed in all His works.

"Parts of his ways" we behold in creation, providence, redemption, but only a "little part" of His might is seen in them. Remarkably this is brought out in Habakkuk 3:4; "and there was the hiding of His power." It is scarcely possible to imagine anything more grandiloquent than the imagery of this whole chapter; yet nothing in it surpasses the nobility of this statement. The prophet (in a vision) beheld the mighty God scattering the hills and overturning the mountains, which one would think afforded an amazing demonstration of His power. Nay, says our verse, that is rather the "hiding" than the displaying of His power. What does it mean? So inconceivable, so immense, so uncontrollable is the power of deity, that the fearful convulsions which He works in nature conceal more than they reveal of His infinite might!

It is very beautiful to link together the following passages: "He walketh upon the waves of the sea" (Job 9:8), which expresses God's uncontrollable power. "He walketh in the circuit of heaven" (Job 22:14), which tells of the immensity of His presence. "He walketh upon the wings of the wind" (Ps. 104:3), which signifies the amazing swiftness of His operations. This last expression is very remarkable. It is not that "He flieth," or "runneth," but that He "walketh" and that, on the very "wings of the wind"—on the most impetuous of the elements, tossed into utmost rage, and sweeping along with almost inconceivable rapidity, yet they are under His feet, beneath His perfect control!

Let us now consider God's power in creation. "The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine, as for the world and the fullness thereof, thou hast founded them. The north and the south thou hast created them" (Ps. 89:11-12). Before man can work he must have both tools and materials. But God began with nothing, and by His word alone out of nothing He made all things. The intellect cannot grasp it. God "spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:9). Primeval matter heard His voice. "God said, Let there be . . . and it was so" (Gen. 1). Well may we exclaim, "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, high is thy right hand" (Ps. 89:13).

Who, that looks upward to the midnight sky; and, with an eye of reason, beholds its rolling wonders; who can forbear enquiring, Of what were their mighty orbs formed? Amazing to relate, they were produced without materials. They sprung from emptiness itself. The stately fabric of universal nature emerged out of nothing. What instruments were used by the Supreme Architect to fashion the parts with such exquisite niceness, and give so beautiful a polish to the whole? How was it all connected into one finely-proportioned and nobly finished structure? A bare fiat accomplished all. Let them be, said God. He added no more; and at once the marvelous edifice arose, adorned with every beauty, displaying innumerable perfections, and declaring amidst enraptured seraphs its great Creator's praise. "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth," Psalm 150:1 (James Hervey, 1789).

Consider God's power in preservation. No creature has power to preserve itself. "Can the rush grow up without mire? Can the flag grow up without water?" (Job 8:11) Both man and beast would perish if there were not herbs for food, and herbs would wither and die if the earth were not refreshed with fruitful showers. Therefore is God called the Preserver of "man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). He "upholdeth all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3).

The preservation of the earth from the violence of the sea is another plain instance of God's might. How is that raging element kept confined within those limits where He first lodged it, continuing its channel, without overflowing the earth and dashing in pieces the lower part of the creation? The natural situation of the water is to be above the earth, because it is lighter, and to be immediately under the air, because it is heavier. Who restrains the natural quality of it? Certainly man does not, and cannot. It is the fiat of its Creator which alone bridles it: "And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:11). What a standing monument of the power of God the preservation of the world is!

Consider God's power in government. Take His restraint of the malice of Satan. "The devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). He is filled with hatred against God, and with fiendish enmity against men, particularly the saints. He who envied Adam in paradise, envies us the pleasure of enjoying any of God's blessings. Could he have his will, he would treat us all the same way he treated Job; he would send fire from heaven on the fruits of the earth, destroy the cattle, cause a wind to overthrow our houses, and cover our bodies with boils. But, little as men may realize it, God bridles him to a large extent, prevents him from carrying out his evil designs, and confines him within His ordinations.

Too, God restrains the natural corruption of men. He suffers sufficient outbreaks of sin to show what fearful havoc has been wrought by man's apostasy from his Maker. But who can conceive the frightful lengths to which men would go were God to remove His curbing hand? "Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, their feet are swift to shed blood" (Rom. 3:15) is the nature of every descendant of Adam. Then what unbridled licentiousness and headstrong folly would triumph in the world, if the power of God did not interpose to lock down the flood-gates of it. See Psalm 93:3-4.

Consider God's power in judgment. When He smites, none can resist Him (see Ezekiel 22:14). How terribly this was exemplified at the flood! God opened the windows of heaven and broke up the great fountains of the deep, and (excepting those in the ark) the entire human race, helpless before the storm of His wrath, was swept away. A shower of fire and brimstone from heaven, and the cities of the plain were exterminated. Pharaoh and all his hosts were impotent when God blew upon them at the Red Sea. What a terrific word is in Romans 9:22: "What if God, willing to show wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." God is going to display His mighty power upon the reprobate, not merely by incarcerating them in Gehenna, but by supernaturally preserving their bodies as well as souls amid the eternal burnings of the lake of fire.

Well may all tremble before such a God. To treat with disrespect One who can crush us more easily than we can a moth, is a suicidal policy. To openly defy Him who is clothed with omnipotence, who can rend in pieces or cast into hell any moment He pleases, is the very height of insanity. To put it on its lowest ground, it is but the part of wisdom to heed His command, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little" (Ps. 2:12).

Well may the enlightened soul adore such a God! The wondrous, infinite perfections of such a Being call for fervent worship. If men of might and renown claim the admiration of the world, how much more should the power of the Almighty fill us with wonderment and homage. "Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods, who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders" (Ex. 15:11).

Well may the saint trust such a God! He is worthy of implicit confidence. Nothing is too hard for Him. If God were stunted in might and had a limit to His strength we might well despair. But seeing that He is clothed with omnipotence, no prayer is too hard for Him to answer, no need too great for Him to supply, no passion too strong for Him to subdue, no temptation too powerful for Him to deliver from, no misery too deep for Him to relieve. "The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps. 27:1). "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, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21).

#### **10. The Faithfulness of God**

Unfaithfulness Is One of the most outstanding sins of these evil days. In the business world, a man's word is, with rare exceptions, no longer his bond. In the social world, marital infidelity abounds on every hand, the sacred bonds of wedlock are broken with as little regard as discarding an old garment. In the ecclesiastical realm, thousands who have solemnly covenanted to preach the truth have no scruples about attacking and denying it. Nor can reader or writer claim complete immunity from this fearful sin. How many ways have we

been unfaithful to Christ, and to the light and privileges which God has entrusted to us! How refreshing, then, and how blessed, to lift our eyes above this scene of ruin, and behold One who is faithful, faithful in all things, at all times.

"Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God" (Deut. 7:9). This quality is essential to His being, without it He would not be God. For God to be unfaithful would be to act contrary to His nature, which is impossible. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). Faithfulness is one of the glorious perfections of His being. He is clothed with it: "O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee?" (Ps. 89:8). So too when God became incarnate it was said, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins" (Isa. 11:5).

What a word in Psalm 36:5, "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and Thy faithfulness unto the clouds." Far above all finite comprehension is the unchanging faithfulness of God. Everything about God is great, vast, incomparable. He never forgets, never fails, never falters, never forfeits His word. To every declaration of promise or prophecy the Lord has exactly adhered; every engagement of covenant or threatening He will make good, for "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Num. 23:19). Therefore does the believer exclaim, "His compassions fail not, they are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-33).

Scripture abounds in illustrations of God's faithfulness. More than 4,000 years ago He said, "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). Every year furnishes a fresh witness to God's fulfillment of this promise. In Genesis 15 Jehovah declared unto Abraham, "thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them . . . But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again" (vv. 13-16). Centuries ran their weary course. Abraham's descendants groaned amid the brickkilns of Egypt. Had God forgotten His promise? No, indeed. Exodus 12:41, "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt." Through Isaiah the Lord declared, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Again centuries passed, but "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4).

God is true. His Word of promise is sure. In all His relations with His people God is faithful. He may be safely relied upon. No one ever yet really trusted Him in vain. We find this precious truth expressed almost everywhere in the Scriptures, for His people need to know that faithfulness is an essential part of the divine character. This is the basis of our confidence in Him. But it is one thing to accept the faithfulness of God as a divine truth, it is quite another to act upon it. God has given us many "exceeding great and precious promises," but are we really counting on His fulfillment of them? Do we actually expect Him to do for us all that He has said? Are we resting with implicit assurance on these words, "He is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:23).

There are seasons in the lives of all when it is not easy, not even for Christians, to believe that God is faithful. Our faith is sorely tried, our eyes dimmed with tears, and we can no longer trace the outworking of His love. Our ears are distracted with the noises of the world, harassed by the atheistic whisperings of Satan, and we can no longer hear the sweet accents of His still small voice. Cherished plans have been thwarted, friends on whom we relied have failed us, a professed brother or sister in Christ has betrayed us. We are staggered. We sought to be faithful to God, and now a dark cloud hides Him from us.

We find it difficult, yes, impossible, for carnal reasons to harmonize His frowning providence with His gracious promises. Ah, faltering soul, seek grace to heed Isaiah 50:10, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stand upon his God."

When you are tempted to doubt the faithfulness of God, cry out, "Get thee hence, Satan." Though you cannot now harmonize God's mysterious dealings with the avowals of His love, wait on Him for more light. In His own good time He will make it plain to you. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7). The sequel will demonstrate that God has neither forsaken nor deceived His child. "And therefore will the LORD wait that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him" (Isa. 30:18).

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust Him for His grace,  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.  
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread,  
Are rich with mercy, and shall break  
In blessing o'er your head."

"Thy testimonies which thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful" (Ps. 119:138). God has not only told us the best, but also He has not withheld the worst. He has faithfully described the ruin which the fall effected; He has faithfully diagnosed the terrible state which sin produced; He has faithfully made known His inveterate hatred of evil, and that He must punish the same; He has faithfully warned us that He is "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Not only does His Word abound in illustrations of His fidelity in fulfilling His promises, but also it records numerous examples of His faithfulness in making good His threatenings. Every stage of Israel's history exemplifies that solemn fact. So it was with individuals: Pharaoh, Korah, Achan, and a host of others are many proofs. Thus it will be with you. Unless you have fled, or flee, to Christ for refuge, the everlasting burning of the lake of fire will be your certain portion. God is faithful.

God is faithful in preserving His people. "God is faithful, by whom ye are called unto the fellowship of His Son" (1 Cor. 1:9). In the previous verse a promise was made that God would confirm unto the end His own people. The apostle's confidence in the absolute security of believers was founded not on the strength of their resolutions or ability to persevere, but on the veracity of the One who cannot lie. Since God has promised to His Son a certain people for His inheritance, to deliver them from sin and condemnation, and to become the participants of eternal life in glory, it is certain that He will not allow any of them to perish.

God is faithful in disciplining His people. He is faithful in what He withholds, no less than in what He gives. He is faithful in sending sorrow as well as in giving joy. The faithfulness of God is a truth to be confessed by us not only when we are at ease, but also when we are smarting under the sharpest rebuke. Nor must this confession be merely of our mouths, but of our hearts also. When God smites us with the rod of chastisement, it is faithfulness which wields it. To acknowledge this means that we humble ourselves before Him, own that we fully deserve His correction; and instead of murmuring, thank Him for it. God never afflicts without a reason: "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you" (1 Cor. 11:30), illustrates this principle. When His rod falls on us let us say with Daniel, "O LORD, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces" (Dan. 9:7).

"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Ps. 119:75). Trouble and affliction are not only consistent with God's love pledged in the everlasting covenant, but also they are parts of the administration of the same. God is not only faithful, notwithstanding afflictions, but faithful in sending them. "Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes: my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him nor suffer my faithfulness to fail" (Ps. 89:32-33). Chastening is not only reconcilable with God's lovingkindness, but also it is the effect and expression of it. It would quiet the minds of God's people if they would remember that His covenant love binds Him to lay on them seasonable correction. Afflictions are necessary for us: "In their affliction they will seek me early" (Hosea 5:15).

God is faithful in glorifying His people. "Faithful is he which calleth you, who also will do" (1 Thess. 5:24). The immediate reference here is to saints being "preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." God treats us not on the ground of our merits (for we have none), but for His own great name's sake. God is constant to Himself and to His own purpose of grace "whom he called . . . them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30). God gives a full demonstration of the constancy of His everlasting goodness toward His elect by effectually calling them out of darkness into His marvelous light. This should fully assure them of the certain continuance of it. "The foundation of God standeth sure" (2 Tim. 2:19). Paul rested on the faithfulness of God when he said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Apprehension of this blessed truth will preserve us from worry. To be full of care, to view our situation with dark forebodings, to anticipate the morrow with sad anxiety, is to reflect upon the faithfulness of God. He who has cared for His child through all the years, will not forsake him in old age. He who has heard your prayers in the past, will not refuse to supply your need in the present emergency. Rest on Job 5:19, "He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall be no evil touch thee."

Apprehension of this truth will check our murmurings. The Lord knows what is best for each of us. One effect of resting on this truth will be to silence our petulant complainings. God is greatly honored when, under trial and chastening, we have good thoughts of Him, vindicate His wisdom and justice, and recognize His love in His rebukes.

Apprehension of this truth will breed increasing confidence in God. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4:19). The sooner we trustfully resign ourselves, and all our affairs into God's hands, fully persuaded of His love and faithfulness, the sooner we will be satisfied with His providences and realize that "He doeth all things well."