

The Existence and Attributes of God

by Stephen Charnock

DISCOURSE VI - ON THE IMMUTABILITY OF GOD

PSALM 102:26, 27.—*They shall perish but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*

THIS Psalm contains a complaint of a people pressed with a great calamity; some think of the Jewish church in Babylon; others think the Psalmist doth here personate mankind lying under a state of corruption, because he wishes for the coming of the Messiah, to accomplish that redemption promised by God, and needed by them. Indeed the title of the Psalm is “A prayer of the afflicted when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord;” whether afflicted with the sense of corruption, or with the sense of oppression. And the redemption by the Messiah, which the ancient church looked upon as the fountain of their deliverance from a sinful or a servile bondage, is in this psalm spoken of. A set time appointed for the discovery of his mercy to Sion (ver. 13); an appearance in glory to build up Sion (ver. 16); the loosing of the prisoner by redemption, and them that are appointed to death (ver.

17); the calling of the Gentiles (ver. 22); and the latter part of the psalm, wherein are the verses I have read, are applied to Christ (Heb. 1.) Whatsoever the design of the psalm might be, many things are intermingled that concern the kingdom of the Messiah, and redemption by Christ.

Some make three parts of the psalm. 1. A petition plainly delivered (ver. 1, 2): “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee,” &c. 2. The petition strongly and argumentatively enforced and pleaded (ver. 3), from the misery of the petitioner in himself, and his reproach from his enemies. 3. An acting of faith in the expectation of an answer in the general redemption promised (ver. 12, 13): “But thou, O Lord, shalt endure forever; thou shalt arise and the mercy upon Sion; the heathen shall fear thy name.” The first part is the petition pleaded; the second part is the petition answered, in an assurance that there should in time be a full deliverance. The design of the penman is to confirm the church in the truth of the divine promises; that though the foundations of the world should be ripped up, and the heavens clatter together, and the whole fabric of them be unpinned and fall to pieces, the firmest parts of it dissolved; yet the church should continue in its stability, because it stands not upon the changeableness of creatures, but is built upon the immutable rock of the truth of God, which is as little subject to change, as his essence.

They shall perish, thou shalt change them. As he had before ascribed to God the “foundation of heaven and earth” (ver. 25), so he ascribes to God here the destruction of them. Both the beginning and end of the world are here ascertained. There is nothing, indeed, from the present appearance of things, that can demonstrate the cessation of the world. The heaven and earth stand firm; the motions of the heavenly bodies are the same, their beauty is not decayed; individuals corrupt, but the species and kinds remain.

The successions of the year observe their due order; but the sin of man renders the change of the present appearance of the world necessary to accomplish the design of God for the glory of his elect. The heavens do not naturally perish, as some fancied an old age of the world, wherein it must necessarily decay as the bodies of animals do; or that the parts of the heavens are broken off by their rubbing one against another in their motion, and falling to the earth, are the seeds of those things that grow among us.

The earth and heavens. He names here the most stable parts of the world, and the most beautiful parts of the creation; those that are freest from corruptibility and change, to illustrate thereby the immutability of God; that though the heavens and earth have a prerogative of fixedness above other parts of the world, and the creatures that reside below, the heavens remain the same as they were created, and the centre of the earth retains its fixedness, and are as beautiful and fresh in their age as they were in their youth many years ago, notwithstanding the change of the elements, fire and water being often turned into air, so that there may remain but little of that air which was first created by reason of the continual transmutation; yet this firmness of the earth and heavens is not to be regarded in comparison of the unmovableness and fixedness of the being of God; as their beauty comes short of the glory of his being, so doth their firmness come short of his stability. Some, by heavens and earth, understand the creatures which reside in the earth, and those which are in the air, which is called heaven often in Scripture; but the ruin and fall of these being seen every day, had been no fit illustration of the unchangeableness of God.

They shall perish, they shall be changed. 1. *They may perish*, say some; they have it not from themselves that they do not perish, but from thee, who didst endue them with an incorruptible nature; they shall perish if thou speakest the word; thou canst with as much ease destroy them, as thou didst create them. But the Psalmist speaks not of their possibility, but the certainty of their perishing. 2. *They shall perish* in their qualities and motion, not in their substance, say others. They shall cease from that motion which is designed properly for the generation and corruption of things in the earth; but in regard of their substance and beauty they shall remain. As when the strings or wheels of a clock or watch are taken off, the material parts remain, though the motion of it, and the use for discovering the time of the day, ceaseth. To perish, doth not signify always a falling into nothing, an annihilation, by which both the matter and the form are destroyed, but a ceasing of the present appearance of them; a ceasing to be what they now are; as a man is

said to perish when he dies, whereas the better part of man doth not cease to be. The figure of the body moulders away, and the matter of it returns to dust; but the soul being immortal ceaseth not to act, when the body, by reason of the absence of the soul, is incapable of acting. So the heavens shall perish; the appearance they now have shall vanish, and a more glorious and incorruptible frame be erected by the power and goodness of God. The dissolution of heaven and earth is meant by the word *perish*; the raising a new frame is signified by the word *changed*: as if the Spirit of God would prevent any wrong meaning of the word *perish*, by alleviating the sense of that, by another which signifies only a mutation and change; as when we change a habit and garment, we quit the old to receive the new.

As a garment, as a vesture. Thou shalt change them, *ἐλξῆς*, thou shalt fold them up. The heavens are compared to a curtain (Psalm 104:2), and shall in due time be folded up as clothes and curtains are. As a garment encompasseth the whole body, so do the heavens encircle the earth. Some say, as a garment is folded up to be laid aside, that when there is need it may be taken again for use; so shalt thou fold up the heavens like a garment, that when they are repaired, thou mayest again stretch them out about the earth; thou shalt fold them up, so that what did appear shall not now appear. It may be illustrated by the metaphor of a scroll or book, which the Spirit of God useth (Isa. 34:4; Rev. 6:14): “The heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.” When a book is rolled up or shut, nothing can be read in it till it be opened again; so the face of the heavens, wherein the stars are as letters declaring the glory of God, shall be shut or rolled together, so that nothing shall appear, till by its renovation it be opened again: as a garment it shall be changed, not to be used in the same fashion, and for the same use again. It seems, indeed, to be for the worse; an old garment is not changed but into rags, to be put to other uses, and afterwards thrown upon the dunghill; but similitudes are not to be pressed too far; and this will not agree with the new heavens and new earth, physically so, as well as metaphorically so. It is not likely the heavens will be put to a worse use than God designed them for in creation; however, a change as a garment, speaks not a total corruption, but an alteration of qualities; as a garment not to be used in the same fashion as before. We may observe, that it is probable the world shall not be annihilated, but refined. It shall lose its present form and fashion; but not its foundation: indeed, as God raised it from nothing, so he can reduce it into nothing; yet it doth not appear that God will annihilate it, and utterly destroy both the matter and form of it; part shall be consumed, and part purified (2 Pet. 3:12, 13): “The heavens shall be on fire and dissolved; nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth.” They shall be melted down as gold by the artificer, to be refined from its dross, and wrought into a more beautiful fashion, that they may serve the design of God for those that shall reside therein; a new world wherein righteousness shall dwell: the apostle opposing it thereby to the old world wherein wickedness did reside. The heavens are to be purged, as the vessels that held the sin-offering were to be purified by the fire of the sanctuary. God, indeed, will take down this scaffold, which he hath built to publish his glory. As every individual hath a certain term of its duration, so an end is appointed for the universal nature of heaven and earth (Isa. 51:6): “The heavens shall vanish like smoke” which disappears. As smoke is resolved and attenuated into air, not annihilated, so shall the world assume a new face, and have a greater clearness and splendor; as the bodies of men, dissolved into dust, shall have more glorious qualities at their resurrection; as a vessel of gold is melted down to remove the batterings in it, and receive a more comely form by the skill of the workman.

1. The world was not destroyed by the deluge: it was rather washed by water, than consumed; so it shall be rather refined by the last fire, than lie under an irrecoverable ruin.
2. It is not likely God would liken the everlastingness of his covenant, and the perpetuity of his spiritual Israel, to the duration of the ordinances of the heavens (as he doth in Jer. 31:35, 36), if they were wholly to depart from before him. Though that place may only tend to an assurance of a church in the world, while the world endures; yet it would be but small comfort, if the happiness of believers should endure no longer than the heavens and earth, if they were to have a total period.
3. Besides, the bodies of the saints must have place for their support to move in, and glorious objects suited to those glorious senses which shall be restored to them; not in any carnal way, which our Saviour rejects, when he saith, There is no eating, or drinking, or marrying, &c. in the other world; but whereby they may glorify God; though how or in what manner their senses shall be used, would be rashness to determine; only something is necessary for the corporeal state of men, that there may be an employment for their senses as well as their souls.
4. Again, How could the creature, the world, or any part of it, be said to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, if the whole frame of heaven and earth were to be annihilated (Rom. 8:21)? The apostle saith also, that the creature waits with an “earnest expectation for this manifestation of the sons of God” (ver. 19); which would have no foundation if the whole frame should be reduced to nothing. What joyful expectation can there be in any of a total ruin?

How should the creature be capable of partaking in this glorious liberty of the sons of God?e As the world for the sin of man lost its first dignity, and was cursed alter the fall, and the beauty bestowed upon it by creation defaced; so it shall recover that ancient glory, when he shall be fully restored by the resurrection to that dignity he lost by his first sin.

As man shall be freed from his corruptibility to receive that glory which is prepared for him, so shall the creatures be freed from that imperfection or corruptibility, those stains and spots upon the face of them, to receive a new glory suited to their nature, and answerable to the design of God, when the glorious liberty of the saints shall be accomplished. As when a prince's nuptials are solemnized, the whole country echoes with joy; so the inanimate creatures, when the time of the marriage of the Lamb is come, shall have a delight and pleasure from that renovation. The apostle sets forth the whole world as a person groaning; and the Scripture is frequent in such metaphors; as when the creatures are said to wait upon God, and to be troubled, the hills are said to leap and the mountains to rejoice (Psalm 104:27–29); the creature is said to groan, as the heavens are said to declare the glory of God, passively, naturally, not rationally. It is not likely angels are here meant, though they cannot but desire it; since they are affected with the dishonor and reproach God hath in the world, they cannot but long for the restoration of his honor in the restoration of the creature to its true end: and, indeed, the angels are employed to serve man in this sinful state, and cannot but in holiness wish the creature freed from his corruption. Nor is it meant of the new creatures, which have the first fruits of the Spirit; those he brings in afterwards, groaning and waiting for the adoption (ver. 23); where he distinguisheth the rational creature from the creature he had spoken of before. If he had meant the believing creature by that creature that desired the liberty of the sons of God, what need had there been of that additional distinction, and not only they, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves? Whereby it seems he means some creatures below rational creatures, since neither angels nor blessed souls can be said to travail in pain, with that distress as a woman in travail hath, as the word signifies, who perform the work joyfully which God sets them upon. If the creatures

be subject to vanity by the sin of man, they shall also partake of a happiness by the restoration of man. The earth hath borne thorns and thistles, and venomous beasts; the air hath had its tempests and infectious qualities; the water hath caused its floods and deluges. The creature hath been abused to luxury and intemperance; and been tyrannized over by man, contrary to the end of its creation.

It is convenient that some time should be allotted for the creature's attaining its true end, and that it may partake of the peace of man, as it hath done of the fruits of his sin; otherwise it would seem, that sin had prevailed more than grace, and would have had more power to deface, than grace to restore things into their due order.

5. Again, Upon what account should the Psalmist exhort the heavens to rejoice, and the earth to be glad, when God "comes to judge the world with righteousness" (Psalm 96:11–13), if they should be annihilated and sunk forever into nothing? "It would seem," saith Daille, "to be an impertinent figure, if the Judge of the world brought to them a total destruction; an entire ruin could not be matter of triumph to creatures, who naturally have that instinct or inclination put into them by their Creator, to preserve themselves, and to effect their own preservation."

6. Again, the Lord is to rejoice in his works (Psalm 104:31): "The glory of the Lord shall endure forever; the Lord shall rejoice in his works;" not hath, but shall rejoice in his works: in the works of creation, which the Psalmist had enumerated, and which is the whole scope of the Psalm: and he intimates that it is part of the glory of the Lord which endures forever; that is, his manifestative glory, to rejoice in his works: the glory of the Lord must be understood with reference to the creation he had spoken of before. How short was that joy God had in his works after he had sent them beautified out of his hand! How soon did he repent, not only that he had made man, but was grieved at the heart also, that he made the other creatures which man's sin had disordered! (Gen. 6:7.) What joy can God have in them, since the curse upon the entrance of sin into the world remains upon them? If they are to be annihilated upon the full restoration of his holiness, what time will God have to rejoice in the other works of creation? It is the joy of God to see all his works in due order; every one pointing to their true end; marching together in their excellency, according to his first intendment in their creation. Did God create the world to perform its end only for one day; scarce so much, if Adam fell the very first day of his creation? What would have been their end, if Adam had been confirmed in a state of happiness as the angels were? 'tis likely will be answered and performed upon the complete restoration of man to that happy state from whence he fell. What artificer compiles a work by his skill, but to rejoice in it? And shall God have no joy from the works of his hands? Since God can only rejoice in goodness, the creatures must have that goodness restore to them which God pronounced them to have at the first creation, and which he ordained them for, before he can again rejoice in his works. The goodness of the creatures is the glory and joy of God.

Inference 1. We may infer from hence, what a base and vile thing sin is, which lays the foundation of the world's change. Sin brings it to a decrepit age; sin overturned the whole work of God (Gen. 3:17); so that to render it useful to its proper end, there is a necessity of a kind of a new creating it. This causes God to fire the earth for a purification of it from that infection and contagion brought upon it by the apostasy and corruption of man. It hath served sinful man, and therefore must undergo a purging flame, to be fit to serve the holy and righteous Creator. As sin is so riveted in the body of man, that there is need of a change by death to raze it out; so hath the curse for sin got so deep into the bowels of the world, that there is need of a change by fire to refine it for its master's use. Let us look upon sin with no other notion than as the object of God's hatred, the cause of his grief in the creatures, and the spring of the pain and ruin of the world.

2. How foolish a thing is it to set our hearts upon that which shall perish, and be no more what it is now! The heavens and the earth, the solidest and firmest parts of the creation, shall not continue in the posture they are; they must perish and undergo a refining change. How feeble and weak are the other parts of the creation, the little creatures walking upon and fluttering about the world, that are perishing and dying every day; and we scarce see them clothed with life and beauty this day, but they wither and are despoiled of all the next; and are such frail things fit objects for our everlasting spirits and affections?

Though the dail employment of the heavens is the declaration of the glory of God (Psalm 19:1), yet neither this, nor their harmony, order, beauty, amazing greatness and glory of them, shall preserve them from a dissolution and melting at the presence of the Lord. Though they have remained in the same posture from the creation till this day, and are of so great antiquity, yet they must bow down to a change before the will and word of their Creator; and shall we rest upon that which shall vanish like smoke? Shall we take any creature for our support like ice, that will crack under our feet, and must, by the order of their Lord Creator, deceive our hopes? Perishing things can be no support to the soul; if we would have rest, we must run to God and rest in God. How contemptible should that be to us, whose fashion shall pass away, which shall not endure long in its present form and appearance; contemptible as a rest, not contemptible as the work of God; contemptible as an end, not contemptible as a means to attain our end! If these must be changed, how unworthy are other things to be the centre of our souls, that change in our very using of them, and slide away in our very enjoyment of them!

Thou art the same. The essence of God, with all the perfections of his nature, are pronounced the same, without any variation from eternity to eternity; so that the text doth not only assert the eternal duration of God, but his immutability in that duration. His eternity is signified in that expression, "Thou shalt endure;" his immutability in this, "Thou art the same." To endure, argues indeed his immutability as well as eternity; for what endures, is not changed, and what is changed, doth not endure; but "Thou art the same" doth more fully signify it. He could not be the same if he could be changed into any other thing than what he is; the Psalmist therefore puts not thou halt been, or shalt be, but thou art the same, without any alteration. "Thou art the same;" that is, the same God; the same in essence and nature; the same in will and purpose. Thou dost change all other things as thou pleatest, but thou art immutable in every respect, and receivest no shadow of change, though never so light and small. The Psalmist here alludes to the name Jehovah, I Am; and doth not only ascribe immutability to God, but exclude everything else from partaking in that perfection. All things else are tottering; God sees all other things in continual motion under his feet, like water passing away and no more seen; while he remains fixed and immovable; his wisdom and power, his knowledge and will, are always the same. His essence can receive no alteration, neither by itself, nor by any external cause; whereas other things either naturally decline to destruction, pass from one term to another, till they come to their period; or shall at the last day be wrapped up, after God hath completed his will in them and by them, as a man doth a garment he intends to repair and transform to another use. So that in the text, God, as immutable, is opposed to all creatures as perishing and changeable.

Doctrine. God is unchangeable in his essence, nature, and perfections. Immutability and eternity are linked together; and, indeed, true eternity is true immutability; whence eternity is defined the possession of an immutable life. Yet immutability differs from eternity in

our conception; immutability respects the essence or existence of a thing; eternity respects the duration of a being in that state, or rather, immutability is the state itself; eternity is the measure of that state. A thing is said to be changed, when it is otherwise now in regard of nature, state, will, or any quality than it was before; when either something is added to it, or taken from it; when it either loses or acquires. But now it is the essential property of God, not to have any accession to, or diminution of, his essence or attributes, but to remain entirely the same. He wants nothing; he loses nothing; but doth uniformly exist by himself, without any new nature, new thoughts, new will, new purpose, or new place. This unchangeableness of God was anciently represented by the figure of a cube, a piece of metal or wood framed four-square, when every side is exactly of the same equality; cast it which way you will, it will always be in the same posture, because it is equal to itself in all its dimensions. He was therefore said to be the centre of all things, and other things the circumference; the centre is never moved, while the circumference is; it remains immovable in the midst of the circle; "There is no variableness nor shadow of turning with him" (James 1:17). The moon hath her spots, so hath the sun; there is a mixture of light and darkness; it hath its changes; sometimes it is in the increase, sometimes in the wane; it is always either gaining or losing, and by the turnings and motions, either of the heavenly bodies or of the earth, it is in its eclipse, by the interposition of the earth between that and the sun. The sun also hath its diurnal and annual motion; it riseth and sets, and puts on a different face; it doth not always shine with the noon-day light; it is sometimes veiled with clouds and vapors; it is always going from one tropic to another, whereby it makes various shadows on the earth, and produceth the various seasons of the year; it is not always in our hemisphere, nor doth it always shine with an equal force and brightness in it. Such shadows and variations have no place in the eternal Father of Lights; he hath not the least spot or diminution of brightness; nothing can cloud him or eclipse him.

For the better understanding this perfection of God, I shall premise three things.

1. The immutability of God is a perfection. Immutability considered in itself, without relation to other things, is not a perfection. It is the greatest misery and imperfection of the evil angels, that they are immutable in malice against God; but as God is infinite in essence, infinitely good, wise, holy; so it is a perfection necessary to his nature, that he should be immutably all this, all excellency, goodness, wisdom, immutably all that he is; without this he would be an imperfect Being. Are not the angels in heaven, who are confirmed in a holy and happy state, more perfect than when they were in a possibility of committing evil and becoming miserable? Are not the saints in heaven, whose wills by grace do unalterably cleave to God and goodness, more perfect than if they were as Adam in Paradise, capable of losing their felicity, as well as preserving it? We count a rock, in regard of its stability, more excellent than the dust of the ground, or a feather that is tossed about with every wind; is it not also the perfection of the body to have a constant tenor of health, and the glory of a man not to warp aside from what is just and right, by the persuasions of any temptations?

2. Immutability is a glory belonging to all the attributes of God. It is not a single perfection of the Divine nature, nor is it limited to particular objects thus and thus disposed. Mercy and justice have their distinct objects and distinct acts; mercy is conversant about a penitent, justice conversant about an obstinate sinner. In our notion and conception of the Divine perfections, his perfections are different: the wisdom of God is not his power, nor his power his holiness, but immutability is the centre wherein they all unite. There is not one perfection but may be said to be and truly is, immutable; none of them will appear so glorious without this beam, this sun of immutability, which renders them highly excellent without the least shadow of imperfection. How cloudy would his blessedness be if it were changeable! How dim his wisdom, if it might be obscured! How feeble his power, if it were capable to be sickly and languish! How would mercy lose much of its lustre, if it could change into wrath; and justice much of its dread, if it could be turned into mercy, while the object of justice remains unfit for mercy, and one that hath need of mercy continues only fit for the Divine fury! But unchangeableness is a thread that runs through the whole web; it is the enamel of all the rest; none of them without it could look with a triumphant aspect. His power is unchangeable: "In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength" (Isa. 26:4). His mercy and his holiness endure forever: he never could, nor ever can, look upon iniquity (Hab. 1:13).

He is a rock in the righteousness of his ways, the truth of his word, the holiness of his proceedings, and the rectitude of his nature. All are expressed Deut 32:4): "He is a rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is he." All that we consider in God is unchangeable; for his essence and his properties are the same, and, therefore, what is necessarily belonging to the essence of God, belongs also to every perfection of the nature of God; none of them can receive any addition or diminution. From the unchangeableness of his nature, the apostle (James 1:17) infers the unchangeableness of his holiness, and himself (in Mal. 3:6) the unchangeableness of his counsel.

3. Unchangeableness doth necessarily pertain to the nature of God. It is of the same necessity with the rectitude of his nature; he can no more be changeable in his essence than he can be unrighteous in his actions. God is a necessary Being; he is necessarily what he is, and, therefore, is unchangeably what he is. Mutability belongs to contingency. If any perfection of his nature could be separated from him, he would cease to be God. What did not possess the whole nature of God, could not have the essence of God; it is reciprocated with the nature of God. Whatsoever is immutable by nature is God; whatsoever is God is immutable by nature. Some creatures are immutable by his grace and power. God is holy, happy, wise, good, by his essence; angels and men are made holy, wise, happy, strong, and good, by qualities and graces. The holiness, happiness, and wisdom of saints and angels, as they had a beginning, so they are capable of increase and diminution, and of an end also; for their standing is not from themselves, or from the nature of created strength, holiness, or wisdom, which in themselves are apt to fail, and finally to decay; but from the stability and confirmation they have by the gift and grace of God. The heaven and earth shall be changed; and after that renewal and reparation they shall not be changed. Our bodies after the resurrection shall not be changed, but forever be "made conformable to the glorious body of Christ" (Phil. 3:21); but this is by the powerful grace of God: so that, indeed, those things may be said afterwards rather to be unchanged than unchangeable, because they are not so by nature, but by sovereign dispensation. As creatures have not necessary beings, so they have not necessary immutability. Necessity of being, and, therefore, immutability of being, belongs by nature only to God; otherwise, if there were any change in God, he would be sometimes what he was not, and would cease to be what he was, which is against the nature, and, indeed, against the natural notion of a Deity. Let us see then,

I. In what regards God is immutable. II. Prove that God is immutable. III. That this is proper to God, and incommunicable to any creature. IV. Some propositions to clear the unchangeableness of God from anything that seems contrary to it. V. The use.

I. In what respects God is unchangeable.

1. God is unchangeable in his essence. He is unalterably fixed in his being, so that not a particle of it can be lost from it, not a mite

added to it. If a man continue in being as long as Methuselah, nine hundred and sixty-nine years; yet there is not a day, nay, an hour, wherein there is not some alteration in his substance. Though no substantial part is wanting, yet there is an addition to him by his food, a diminution of something by his labor; he is always making some acquisition, or suffering some loss: but in God there can be no alteration, by the accession of anything to make his substance greater or better, or by diminution to make it less or worse. He who hath not being from another, cannot but be always what he is: God is the first Being, an independent Being; he was not produced of himself, or of any other, but by nature always hath been, and, therefore, cannot by himself, or by any other, be changed from what he is in his own nature. That which is not may as well assume to itself a being, as he who hath and is all being, have the least change from what he is. Again, because he is a Spirit, he is not subject to those mutations which are found in corporeal and bodily natures; because he is an absolutely simple Spirit, not having the least particle of composition; he is not capable of those changes which may be in created spirits.

(1.) If his essence were mutable, God would not truly be; it could not be truly said by himself, "I Am that I Am" (Exod. 3:14), if he were such a thing or Being at this time, and a different Being at another time. Whatsoever is changed properly is not, because it doth not remain to be what it was; that which is changed was something, is something, and will be something. A being remains to that thing which is changed; yet though it may be said such a thing is, yet it may be also said such a thing is not, because it is not what it was in its first being; it is not now what it was, it is now what it was not; it is another thing than it was, it was another thing than it is; it will be another thing than what it is or was. It is, indeed, a being, but a different being from what it was before. But if God were changed, it could not be said of him that he is, but it might also be said of him that he is not; or if he were changeable, or could be changed, it might be said of him he is, but he will not be what he is; or he may not be what he is, but there will be or may be some difference in his being, and so God would not be "I Am that I Am;" for though he would not cease utterly to be, yet he would cease to be what he was before.

(2.) Again: if his essence were mutable, he could not be perfectly blessed, and fully rejoice in himself.

If he changed for the better, he could not have an infinite pleasure in what he was before the change, because he was not infinitely blessed; and the pleasure of that state could not be of a higher kind than the state itself, or, at least, the apprehension of a happiness in it. If he changed for the worse, he could not have a pleasure in it after the change; for according to the diminution of his state would be the decrease of his pleasure. His pleasure could not be infinite before the change, if he changed for the better; it could not be infinite after the change, if he changed for the worse. If he changed for the better, he would not have had an infinite goodness of being before; and not having an infinite goodness of being, he would have a finite goodness of being; for there is no medium between finite and infinite. Then, though the change were for the better, yet, being finite before, something would be still wanting to make him infinitely blessed; because being finite, he could not change to that which is infinite; for finite and infinite are extremes so distant, that they can never pass into one another; that is, that that which is finite should become infinite, or that which is infinite should become finite; so that supposing him mutable, his essence in no state of change could furnish him with an infinite peace and blessedness.

(3.) Again: if God's essence be changed, he either increaseth or diminisheth. Whatsoever is changed, doth either gain by receiving something larger and greater than it had in itself before, or gains nothing by being changed. If the former, then it receives more than itself, more than it had in itself before. The Divine nature cannot be increased; for whatsoever receives anything than what it had in itself before, must necessarily receive it from another, because nothing can give to itself that which it hath not. But God cannot receive from another what he hath not already, because whatsoever other things possess is derived from him, and, therefore, contained in him, as the fountain contains the virtue in itself which it conveys to the streams; so that God cannot gain anything. If a thing that is changed gain nothing by that change, it loseth something of what it had before in itself; and this loss must be by itself or some other. God cannot receive any loss from anything in himself; he cannot will his own diminution, that is repugnant to every nature. He may as well will his own destruction as his own decrease: every decrease is a partial destruction. But it is impossible for God to die any kind of death, to have any resemblance of death, for he is immortal, and "only hath immortality" (1 Tim. 6:16), therefore impossible to be diminished in any particle of his essence; nor can he be diminished by anything in his own nature, because his infinite simplicity admits of nothing distinct from himself, or contrary to himself. All decreases come from something contrary to the nature of that thing which doth decrease. Whatsoever is made less than itself, was not truly *unum*, one and simple, because that which divides itself in separation was not the same in conjunction. Nor can he be diminished by any other without himself; because nothing is superior to God, nothing stronger than God which can oppress him. But whatsoever is changed is weaker than that which changeth it, and sinks under a power it cannot successfully resist; weakness belongs not to the Deity. Nor, lastly, can God change from a state wherein he is, to another state equal to the former, as men in some cases may do; for in passing from one state to another equal to it, something must be parted with which he had before, that some other thing may accrue to him as a recompense for that loss, to make him equal to what he was. This recompense then he had not before, though he had something equal to it. And in this case it could not be said by God "I Am that I Am," but I am equal to what I was; for in this case there would be a diminution and increase which, as was showed, cannot be in God.

(4.) Again: God is of himself, from no other. Natures, which are made by God, may increase, because they began to be; they may decrease, because they were made of nothing, and so tend to nothing; the condition of their original leads them to defect, and the power of their Creator brings them to increase. But God hath no original; he hath no defect, because he was not made of nothing he hath no increase, because he had no beginning. He was before all things, and, therefore, depends upon no other thing which, by its own change, can bring any change upon him. That which is from itself cannot be changed, because it hath nothing before it, nothing more excellent than itself; but that which is from another as its first cause and chief good, may be changed by that which was its efficient cause and last end.

2. God is immutable in regard of knowledge. God hath known from all eternity all that which he can know, so that nothing is hid from him. He knows not at present any more than he hath known from eternity: and that which he knows now he always knows "All things are open and naked before him" (Heb. 4:13). A man is said to be changed in regard of knowledge, when he knows that now which he did not know before, or knows that to be false now which he thought true before, or has something for the object of his understanding now, which he had not before: But,

(1.) This would be repugnant to the wisdom and omniscience which belongs to the notions of a Deity. That cannot be God that is not infinitely wise; that cannot be infinitely wise that is either ignorant of, or mistaken in, his apprehension of any one thing. If God be

changed in knowledge, it must be for want of wisdom; all change of this nature in creatures implies this defect preceding or accompanying it. Such a thought of God would have been unworthy of him that is "only wise," that hath no mate for wisdom (1 Tim. 1:17); none wise beside himself. If he knew that thing this day which he knew not before, he would not be an "only wise" Being; for a being that did know everything at once might be conceived, and so a wiser being be apprehended by the mind of man. If God understood a thing at one time which he did not at another, he would be changed from ignorance to knowledge; as if he could not do that this day which he could do to-morrow, he would be changed from impotence to power. He could not be always omniscient, because there might be yet something still to come which he yet knows not, though he may know all things that are past. What way soever you suppose a change, you must suppose a present or a past ignorance; if he be changed in his knowledge for the perfection of his understanding, he was ignorant before; if his understanding be impaired by the change, he is ignorant after it.

(2.) If God were changeable in his knowledge, it would make him unfit to be an object of trust to any rational creature. His revelations would want the due ground for entertainment, if his understanding were changeable; for that might be revealed as truth now which might prove false hereafter, and that as false now which hereafter might prove true; and so God would be an unfit object of obedience in regard of his precepts, and an unfit object of confidence in regard of his promises. For if he be changeable in knowledge he is defective in knowledge, and might promise that now which he would know afterwards was unfit to be promised, and, therefore, unfit to be performed. It would make him an incompetent object of dread, in regard of his threatenings; for he might threaten that now which he might know hereafter were not fit or just to be inflicted. A changeable mind and understanding cannot make a due and right judgment of things to be done, and things to be avoided; no wise man would judge it reasonable to trust a weak and flitting person. God must needs be unchangeable in his knowledge; but, as the schoolmen say, that, as the sun always shines, so God always knows; as the sun never ceaseth to shine, so God never ceaseth to know. Nothing can be hid from the vast compass of his understanding, no more than anything can shelter itself without the verge of his power. This farther appears in that,

1st. God knows by his own essence. He doth not know, as we do, by habits, qualities, species, whereby we may be mistaken at one time and rectified at another. He hath not an understanding distinct from his essence as we have, but being the most simple Being, his understanding is his essence; and as from the infiniteness of his essence we conclude the infiniteness of his understanding, so from the unchangeableness of his essence, we may justly conclude the unchangeableness of his knowledge. Since, therefore, God is without all composition, and his understanding is not distinct from his essence, what he knows, he knows by his essence, and there can then be no more mutability in his knowledge than there can be in his essence; and if there were any in that, he could not be God, because he would have the property of a creature. If his understanding then be his essence, his knowledge is as necessary, as unchangeable as his essence. As his essence eminently contains all perfections in itself, so his understanding comprehends all things past, present, and future, in itself. If his understanding and his essence were not one and the same, he were not simple, but compounded: if compounded, he would consist of parts; if he consisted of parts, he would not be an independent Being, and so would not be God.

2d. God knows all things by one intuitive act. As there is no succession in his being, so that he is one thing now and another thing hereafter; so there is no succession in his knowledge. He knows things that are successive, before their existence and succession, by one single act of intuition; by one cast of his eye all things future are present to him in regard of his eternity and omnipresence; so that though there is a change and variation in the things known, yet his knowledge of them and their several changes in nature is invariable and unalterable. As imagine a creature that could see with his eye at one glance the whole compass of the heavens, by sending out beams from his eye without receiving any species from them, he would see the whole heavens uniformly, this part now in the east, then in the west, without any change in his eye, for he sees every part and every motion together; and though that great body varies and whirls about, and is in continual agitation, his eye remains steadfast, suffers no change, beholds all their motions at once and by one glance. God knows all things from eternity, and, therefore, perpetually knows them; the reason is because the Divine knowledge is infinite, and therefore, comprehends all knowable truths at once. An eternal knowledge comprehends in itself all time, and beholds past and present in the same manner, and, therefore, his knowledge is immutable: by one simple knowledge he considers the infinite spaces of past and future.

3d. God's knowledge and will is the cause of all things and their successions. There can be no pretence of any changeableness of knowledge in God; but in this case, before things come to pass, he knows that they will come to pass; after they are come to pass, he knows that they are past; and slide away. This would be something if the succession of things were the cause of the Divine knowledge, as it is of our knowledge; but on the contrary, the Divine knowledge and will is the cause of the succession of them: God doth not know creatures because they are; but they are because he knows them: "All his works were known to him from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). All his works were not known to him, if the events of all those works were not also known to him; if they were not known to him, how should he make them? he could not do anything ignorantly. He made them then after he knew them, and did not know them after he made them. His knowledge of them made a change in them; their existence made no change in his knowledge. He knew them when they were to be created, in the same manner that he knew them after they were created; before they were brought into act, as well as after they were brought into act; before they were made, they were, and were not; they were in the knowledge of God, when they were not in their own nature; God did not receive his knowledge from their existence, but his knowledge and will acted upon them to bring them into being.

4th. Therefore the distinction of past and future makes no change in the knowledge of God. When a thing is past, God hath no more distinct knowledge of it after it is past, than he had when it was to come; all things were all in their circumstances of past, present, and to come; seen by his understanding, as they were determined by his will. Besides, to know a day to be past or future, is only to know the state of that day in itself, and to know its relation to that which follows, and that which went before. This day wherein we are, if we consider it in the state wherein it was yesterday, it was to come, it was future; but if we consider it in that state wherein it will be to-morrow, we understand it as past. This in man cannot be said to be a different knowledge of the thing itself, but only of the circumstance attending a thing, and the different relation of it. As I see the sun this day, I know it was up yesterday, I know it will be up to-morrow; my knowledge of the sun is the same; if there be any change, it is in the sun, not in my knowledge; only I apply my knowledge to such particular circumstances. How much more must the knowledge of those things in God be unchangeable, who knows all those states, conditions, and circumstances, most perfectly from eternity; wherein there is no succession, no past or future, and therefore will know them forever! He always beholds the same thing; he sees, indeed, succession in things, and he sees a thing to be past which before was future. As from eternity he saw Adam as existing in such a time; in the first time he saw that he would be, in the following time he saw that he had been; but this he knew from eternity; this he knew in the same manner; though there was a variation in Adam, yet there was no variation in God's knowledge of him, in all his states; though Adam was not present to himself,

yet in all his states he was present to God's eternity.

5th. Consider, that the knowledge of God, in regard of the manner of it, as well as the objects, is incomprehensible to a finite creature. So that though we cannot arrive to a full understanding of the manner of God's knowledge, yet we must conceive so of it, as to remove all imperfection from him in it. And since it is an imperfection to be changeable, we must remove that from God; the knowledge of God about things past, present and future, must be inconceivably above ours: "His understanding is infinite" (Psalm 147:6). There is no number of it; it can no more be calculated or drawn into an account by us, than infinite spaces, which have no bounds and limits, can be measured by us. We can no more arrive, even in heaven, to a comprehensive understanding of the manner of his knowledge, than of the infinite glory of his essence; we may as well comprehend one as the other. This we must conclude, that God being not a body, doth not see one thing with eyes, and another thing with mind, as we do; but being a spirit, he sees and knows only with mind, and his mind is himself, and is as unchangeable as himself; and therefore as he is not now another thing than what he was, so he knows not anything now in another manner than as he knew it from eternity; he sees all things in the glass of his own essence; as, therefore, the glass doth not vary, so neither doth his vision.

3. God is unchangeable in regard of his will and purpose. A change in his purpose is, when a man determines to do that now which before he determined not to do, or to do the contrary; when a man hates that thing which he loved, or begins to love that which he before hated; when the will is changed, a man begins to will that which he willed not before, and ceaseth to will that which he willed before. But whatsoever God hath decreed, is immutable; whatsoever God hath promised, shall be accomplished: "The word that goes forth of his mouth shall not return to him void, but it shall accomplish that which he pleaseth" (Isa. 55:11); whatsoever "he purposeth, he will do" (Isa. 46:11; Num. 23:19); his decrees are therefore called "mountains of brass" (Zech. 6:1): brass, as having substance and solidity; mountains, as being immovable, not only by any creature, but by himself; because they stand upon the basis of infallible wisdom, and are supported by uncontrollable power. From this immutability of his will, published to man, there could be no release from the severity of the law, without satisfaction made by the death of a Mediator, since it was the unalterable will of God, that death should be the wages of sin; and from this immutable will it was, that the length of time, from the first promise of the Redeemer to his mission, and the daily provocations of men, altered not his purpose for the accomplishment of it in the fulness of that time he had resolved upon; nor did the wickedness of former ages hinder the addition of several promises as buttresses to the first. To make this out, consider,

(1.) The will of God is the same with his essence. If God had a will distinct from his essence, he would not be the most simple Being. God hath not a faculty of will distinct from himself; as his understanding is nothing else but *Deus intelligens*, God understanding; so his will is nothing else but *Deus volens*, God willing; being, therefore, the essence of God; though it is considered, according to our weakness, as a faculty, it is as his understanding and wisdom, eternal and immutable; and can no more be changed than his essence. The immutability of the Divine counsel depends upon that of his essence; he is the Lord Jehovah, therefore he is true to his word (Mal. 3:6; Isa. 43:13): "Yea, before the day I am he, and there is none that can deliver out of my hand." He is the same, immutable in his essence, therefore irresistible in his power.

(2.) There is a concurrence of God's will and understanding in everything. As his knowledge is eternal, so is his purpose. Things created had not been known to be, had not God resolved them to be the act of his will; the existence of anything supposeth an act of his will. Again, as God knows all things by one simple vision of his understanding, so he wills all things by one act of volition; therefore the purpose of God in the Scripture is not expressed by counsels in the plural number, but counsel; showing that all the purposes of God are not various, but as one will, branching itself out into many acts towards the creature; but all knit in one root, all links of one chain. Whatsoever is eternal is immutable; as his knowledge is eternal, and therefore immutable, so is his will; he wills or nills nothing to be in time, but what he willed and nilled from eternity; if he willed in time that to be that he willed not from eternity, then he would know that in time which he knew not from eternity; for God knows nothing future, but as his will orders it to be future, and in time to be brought into being.

(3.) There can be no reason for any change in the will of God. When men change in their minds, it must be for want of foresight; because they could not foresee all the rubs and bars which might suddenly offer themselves; which if they had foreseen, they would not have taken such measures: hence men often will that which they afterwards wish they had not willed when they come to understand it clearer, and see that to be injurious to them which they thought to be good for them; or else the change proceeds from a natural instability without any just cause, and an easiness to be drawn into that which is unrighteous; or else it proceeds from a want of power, when men take new counsels, because they are invincibly hindered from executing the old. But none of those can be in God.

1st. It cannot be for want of foresight. What can be wanting to an infinite understanding? How can any unknown event defeat his purpose, since nothing happens in the world but what he wills to effect, or wills to permit; and therefore all future events are present with him? Besides, it doth not consist with God's wisdom to resolve anything, but upon the highest reason; and what is the highest and infinite reason, cannot but be unalterable in itself; for there can be no reason and wisdom higher than the highest. All God's purposes are not bare acts of will, but acts of counsel. "He works all things according to the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11): and he doth not say so much that his will, as that "his counsel shall stand" (Isa. 46:10). It stands, because it is counsel; and the immutability of a promise is called the "immutability of his counsel" (Heb. 6:1?), as being introduced and settled by the most perfect wisdom, and therefore to be carried on to a full and complete execution; his purpose, then, cannot be changed for want of foresight; for this would be a charge of weakness.

2d. Nor can it proceed from a natural instability of his will, or an easiness to be drawn to that which is unrighteous. If his will should not adhere to his counsel, it is because it is not fit to be followed, or because it will not follow it; if not fit to be followed, it is a reflection upon his wisdom; if it be established, and he will not follow it, there is a contrariety in God, as there is in a fallen creature, will against wisdom. That cannot be in God which he hates in a creature, viz. the disorder of faculties, and being out of their due place. The righteousness of God is like a "great mountain" (Psalm 36:6). The rectitude of his nature is as immovable in itself, as all the mountains in the world are by the strength of man. "He is not as a man, that he should repent or lie" (Num. 23:19); who often changes, out of a perversity of will, as well as want of wisdom to foresee, or want of ability to perform. His eternal purpose must either be righteous or unrighteous; if righteous and holy, he would become unholy by the change; if not righteous nor holy, then he was unrighteous before the change; which way soever it falls, it would reflect upon the righteousness of God, which is a blasphemous imagination. If God did change his purpose, it must be either for the better,—then the counsel of God was bad before; or for the worse,

—then he was not wise and good before.

3d. Nor can it be for want of strength. Who hath power to control him? Not all the combined devices and endeavors of men can make the counsel of God to totter (Prov. 19:21): “There are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand;” that, and that only shall stand. Man hath a power to devise and imagine, but no power to effect and execute of himself. God wants no more power to effect what he will, than he wants understanding to know what is fit. Well, then, since God wanted not wisdom to frame his decrees, nor holiness to regulate them, nor power to effect them, what should make him change them? since there can be no reason superior to his, no event unforeseen by him, no holiness comparable to his, no unrighteousness found in him, no power equal to his, to put a rub in his way.

4th. Though the will of God be immutable, yet it is not to be understood so, as that the things themselves so willed are immutable. Nor will the immutability of the things willed by him, follow upon the unchangeableness of his will in willing them; though God be firm in willing them, yet he doth not will that they should alway be. God did not perpetually will the doing those things which he once decreed to be done; he decreed that Christ should suffer, but he did not decree that Christ should alway suffer; so he willed the Mosaical rites for a time, but he did not will that they should alway continue; he willed that they should endure only for a time; and when the time came for their ceasing, God had been mutable if he had not put an end to them, because his will had fixed such a period. So that the changing of those things which he had once appointed to be practised, is so far from charging God with changeableness, that God would be mutable if he did not take them away; since he decreed as well their abolition at such a time, as their continuance till such a time; so that the removal of them was pursuant to his unchangeable will and decree. If God had decreed that such laws should alway continue, and afterwards changed that decree, and resolved the abrogation of them, then indeed God had been mutable; he had rescinded one decree by another; he had then seen an error in his first resolve, and there must be some weakness in the reason and wisdom whereon it was grounded. But it was not so here; for the change of those laws is so far from slurring God with any mutability, that the very, change of them is no other than the issue of his eternal decree; for from eternity he purposed in himself to change this or that dispensation, though he did decree to bring such a dispensation into the world. The decree itself was eternal and immutable, but the thing decreed was temporary and mutable. As a decree from eternity doth not make the thing decreed to be eternal, so neither doth the immutability of the decree render the thing so decreed to be immutable: as for example, God decreed from all eternity to create the world; the eternity of this decree did not make the world to be in being and actually created from eternity; so God decreed immutably that the world so created should continue for such a time; the decree is immutable if the world perish at that time, and would not be immutable if the world did endure beyond that time that God hath fixed for the duration of it: as when a prince orders a man’s remaining in prison for so many days; if he be prevailed with to give him a delivery before those days, or to continue him in custody for the same crime after those days, his order is changed; but if he orders the delivery of him just at that time, till which he had before decreed that he should continue in prison, the purpose and order of the prince remains firm, and the change in the state of the prisoner is the fruit of that firm and fixed resolution: so that we must distinguish between the person decreeing, the decree itself, and the thing decreed. The person decreeing, viz., God, is in himself immutable, and the decree is immutable; but the thing decreed may be mutable; and if it were not changed according to the first purpose, it would argue the decree itself to be changed; for while a man wills that this may be done now, and another thing done afterwards, the same will remains; and though there be a change in the effects, there is no change in the will.

5th. The immutability of God’s will doth not infringe the liberty of it. The liberty of God’s will consists with the necessity of continuing his purpose. God is necessarily good, immutably good; yet he is freely so, and would not be otherwise than what he is. God was free in his first purpose; and purposing this or that by an infallible and unerring wisdom, it would be a weakness to change the purpose. But, indeed, the liberty of God’s will doth not seem so much to consist in an indifferency to this or that, as in an independency on anything without himself: his will was free, because it did not depend upon the objects about which his will was conversant. To be immutably good is no point of imperfection, but the height of perfection.

4. As God is unchangeable in regard of essence, knowledge, purpose, so he is unchangeable in regard of place. He cannot be changed in time, because he is eternity; so he cannot be changed in place, because he hath ubiquity: he is eternal, therefore cannot be changed in time; he is omnipresent, therefore cannot be changed in place he doth not begin to be in one place wherein he was not before, or cease to be in a place wherein he was before. He that fills every place in heaven and earth, cannot change place; he cannot leave one to possess another, that is equally, in regard of his essence, in all: “He fills heaven and earth” (Jer. 23:24). The heavens that are not subject to those changes to which sublunary bodies are subject, that are not diminished in quantity or quality; yet they are alway changing place in regard of their motion; no part of them doth alway continue in the same point: but God hath no change of his nature, because he is most inward in everything; he is substantially in all spaces, real and imaginary; there is no part of the world which he doth not fill; no place can be imagined wherein he doth not exist. Suppose a million of worlds above and about this, encircling one another; his essence would be in every part and point of those worlds; because it is indivisible, it cannot be divided; nor can it be contained within those created limits of millions of worlds, when the most soaring and best coining fancy hath run through all creatures to the highest sphere of the heavens, and imagined one world after another, till it can fancy no more: none of these, nor all of these, can contain God; for the “heaven of heavens cannot contain him” (1 Kings 8:27); “He is higher than heaven, deeper than hell” (Job 11:8), and possesses infinite imaginary spaces beyond created limits. He who hath no cause of being, can have no limits of being; and though by creation he began to be in the world, yet he did not begin to be where the world is, but was in the same imaginary space from all eternity; for he was alway in himself by his own eternal *ubi*. Therefore observe, that when God is said to draw near to us when we draw near to him (James 4:8), it is not by local motion or change of place, but by special and spiritual influences, by exciting and supporting grace. As we ordinarily say, the sun is come into the house when yet it remains in its place and order in the heavens, because the beams pierce through the windows and enlighten the room, so when God is said to come down or descend (Gen. 11:5; Exod. 34:5), it is not by a change of place, but a change of outward acts, when he puts forth himself in ways of fresh mercy or new judgments, in the effluxes of his love or the flames of his wrath.

When good men feel the warm beams of his grace refreshing them, or wicked men feel the hot coals of his anger scorching them. God’s drawing near to us is not so much his coming to us, but his drawing us to him; as when watermen pull a rope that is in one end fastened to the shore, and the other end to the vessel; the shore is immovable, yet it seems to the eye to come to them, but they really move to the shore. God is an immovable rock; we are floating and uncertain creatures; while he seems to approach to us, he doth really make us to approach to him; he comes not to us by any change of place himself, but draws us to him by a change of mind, will, and affections in us.

II. . The second thing propounded, is the reasons to prove God immutable. The heathens acknowledged God to be so: Plato and the Pythagoreans called God, or the stable good principle, *ἀνίον*, *idem*: the evil principle, *ἕτερον*, another thing, changeable; one thing one time, and another thing another time (Dan. 6:26): “He is the living God, and steadfast forever.”

1. The name Jehovah signifies this attribute (Exod. 3:14): “I am that I am; I am hath sent me to you.” It signifies his immutability as well as eternity. I am, signifies his eternity; that, or the same that I am, his immutability: as it respects the essence of God, it signifies his unchangeable being from eternity to eternity; as it respects the creature, it signifies his constancy in his counsels and promises, which spring from no other cause but the unchangeableness of his nature. The reason why men stand not to their covenant, is because they are not always the same; I am, that is, I am the same, before the creation of the world, and since the creation of the world; before the entrance of sin, and since the entrance of sin; before their going into Egypt, and while they remain in Egypt. The very name Jehovah bears, according to the grammatical order, a mark of God’s unchangeableness; it never hath anything added to it nor anything taken from it; it hath no plural number, no affixes—a custom peculiar to the eastern languages; it never changes its letters as other words do. That only is a true being which hath not only an eternal existence, but stability in it: that is not truly a being, that never remains in the same state. All things that are changed cease to be what they were, and begin to be what they were not, and therefore cannot have the title truly applied to them, they are; they are, indeed, but like a river in a continual flux, that no man ever sees the same; let his eye be fixed upon one place of it, the water he sees, slides away, and that which he saw not succeeds in its place; let him take his eye off but for the least moment, and fix it there again, and he sees not the same that he saw before. All sensible things are in a perpetual stream; that which is sometimes this and sometimes that, is not, because it is not always the same; whatsoever is changed, is something now which it was not alway; but of God it is said, I am, which could not be if he were changeable; for it may be said of him, he is not, as well as be is, because he is not what he was; if we say not of him, he was, nor he will be, but only he is, whence should any change arrive? He must invincibly remain the same, of whose nature, perfections, knowledge and will, it cannot be said it was, as if it were not now in him; or it shall be, as if it were not yet in him; but he is, because he doth not only exist, but doth always exist the same. I am, that is, I receive from no other what I am in myself; he depends upon no other in his essence, knowledge, purposes, and therefore hath no changing power over him.

2. If God were changeable, he could not be the most perfect Being. God is the most perfect Being, and possesses in himself infinite and essential goodness (Matt. 5:48): “Your heavenly Father is perfect.” If he could change from that perfection, he were not the highest exemplar and copy for us to write after. If God doth change, it must be either to a greater perfection than he had before, or to a less, *mutatio perfectiva vel amissiva*; if he changes to acquire a perfection he had not, then he was not before the most excellent being; necessarily, he was not what he might be; there was a defect in him, and a privation of that which is better than what he had and was; and then he was not alway the best, and so was not alway God; and being not alway God, could never be God; for to begin to be God is against the notion of God; not to a less perfection than he had; that were to change to imperfection, and to lose a perfection which he possessed before, and cease to be the best Being; for he would lose some good which he had, and acquire some evil which he was free from before. So that the sovereign perfection of God is an invincible bar to any change in him; for which way soever you cast it for a change, his supreme excellency is impaired and nulled by it: for in all change there is something from which a thing is changed, and something to which it is changed; so that on the one part there is a loss of what it had, and on the other part there is an acquisition of what it had not. If to the better, he was not perfect, and so was not God; if to the worse, he will not be perfect, and so be no longer God after that change. If God be changed, his change must be voluntary or necessary; if voluntary, he then intends the change for the better, and chose it to acquire a perfection by it; the will must be carried out to anything under the notion of some goodness in that which it desires. Since good is the object of the desire and will of the creature, evil cannot be the object of the desire and will of the Creator. And if he should be changed for the worse, when he did really intend the better, it would speak a defect of wisdom, and a mistake of that for good which was evil and imperfect in itself; and if it be for the better, it must be a motion or change for something without himself; that which he desireth is not possessed by himself, but by some other. There is, then, some good without him and above him, which is the end in this change; for nothing acts but for some end, and that end is within itself or without itself; if the end for which God changes be without himself, then there is something better than himself: besides, if he were voluntarily changed for the better, why did he not change before? If it were for want of power, he had the imperfection of weakness; if for want of knowledge of what was the best good, he had the imperfection of wisdom, he was ignorant of his own happiness; if he had both wisdom to know it, and power to effect it, it must be for want of will; he then wanted that love to himself and his own glory, which is necessary in the Supreme Being. Voluntarily he could not be changed for the worse, he could not be such an enemy to his own glory; there is nothing but would hinder its own imperfection and becoming worse. Necessarily he could not be changed, for that necessity must arise from himself, and then the difficulties spoken of before will recur, or it must arise from another; he cannot be bettered by another, because nothing hath any good but what it hath received from the hands of his bounty, and that without loss to himself, nor made worse; if anything made him worse, it would be sin, but that cannot touch his essence or obscure his glory, but in the design and nature of the sin itself (Job 35:6, 7): “If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? if thou be righteous, what givest thou him; or what receives he at thy hand?” He hath no addition by the service of man, no more than the sun hath of light by a multitude of torches kindled on the earth; nor any more impair by the sins of men, than the light of the sun hath by men’s shooting arrows against it.

3. God were not the most simple being if he were not immutable. There is in everything that is mutable a composition either essential or accidental; and in all changes, something of the thing changed remains, and something of it ceaseth and is done away; as for example, in an accidental change, if a white wall be made black, it loses its white color; but the wall itself, which was the subject of that color, remains and loses nothing of its substance: likewise in a substantial change, as when wood is burnt, the substantial part of wood is lost, the earthly part is changed into ashes, the airy part ascends in smoke, the watery part is changed into air by the fire: there is not an annihilation of it, but a resolution of it into those parts whereof it was compounded; and this change doth evidence that it was compounded of several parts distinct from one another. If there were any change in God, it is by separating something from him, or adding something to him; if by separating something from him, then he was compounded of something distinct from himself; for if it were not distinct from himself it could not be separated from him without loss of his being; if by adding anything to him, then it is a compounding of him, either substantially or accidentally. Mutability is absolutely inconsistent with simplicity, whether the change come from an internal or external principle. If a change be wrought by something without, it supposeth either contrary or various parts in the thing so changed, whereof it doth consist; if it be wrought by anything within, it supposeth that the thing so changed doth consist of one part that doth change it, and another part that is changed, and so it would not be a simple being. If God

could be changed by anything within himself, all in God would not be God; his essence would depend upon some parts, whereof some would be superior to others; if one part were able to change or destroy another, that which doth change would be God, that which is changed would not be God; so God would be made up of a Deity and a non-Deity, and part of God would depend upon God; part would be dependent, and part would be independent; part would be mutable, part immutable: so that mutability is against the notion of God's independency as well as his simplicity. God is the most simple being; for that which is first in nature, having nothing beyond it, cannot by any means be thought to be compounded; for whatsoever is so, depends upon the parts whereof it is compounded, and so is not the first being: now God being infinitely simple, hath nothing in himself which is not himself, and therefore cannot will any change in himself, he being his own essence and existence.

4. God were not eternal if he were mutable. In all change there is something that perishes, either substantially or accidentally. All change is a kind of death, or imitation of death; that which was dies, and begins to be what it was not. The soul of man, though it ceaseth not to be and exist, yet when it ceaseth to be in quality what it was, is said to die. Adam died when he changed from integrity to corruption, though both his soul and body were in being (Gen. 2:17); and the soul of a regenerate man is said to "die to sin," when it is changed from sin to grace (Rom. 6:11). In all change there is a resemblance of death; so the notion of mutability is against the eternity of God. If anything be acquired by a change, then that which is acquired was not from eternity, and so he was not wholly eternal; if anything be lost which was from eternity, he is not wholly everlasting; if he did decrease by the change, something in him which had no beginning would have an end; if he did increase by that change, something in him would have a beginning that might have no end. What is changed doth not remain, and what doth not remain is not eternal. Though God alway remains in regard of existence, he would be immortal, and live alway; yet if he should suffer any change, he could not properly be eternal, because he would not always be the same, and would not in every part be eternal; for all change is finished in time, one moment precedin, another moment following; but that which is before time cannot be changed by time. God cannot be eternally what he was; that is, he cannot have a true eternity, if he had a new knowledge, a new purpose, a new essence; if he were sometimes this and sometimes that, sometimes know this and sometimes know that, sometimes purpose this and afterwards hath a new purpose; he would be partly temporary and partly eternal, not truly and universally eternal. He that hath anything of newness, hath not properly and truly an entire eternity.

Again, by the same reason that God could in the least cease to be what he was, he might also cease wholly to be; and no reason can be rendered why God might not cease wholly to be, as well as cease to be entirely and uniformly what he was. All changeableness implies a corruptibility.

5. If God were changeable, he were not infinite and almighty. All change ends in addition or diminution; if anything be added, he was not infinite before, if anything be diminished, he is not infinite after. All change implies bounds and limits to that which is changed; but God is infinite; "His greatness is unsearchable;" we can add number to number without any end, and can conceive an infinite number; yet the greatness of God is beyond all our conceptions. But if there could be any change in his greatness for the better, it would not be unsearchable before that change; if for the worse, it would not be unsearchable after that change. Whatsoever hath limits and is changeable, is conceivable and searchable; but God is not only not known, but impossible in his own nature to be known and searched out, and, therefore, impossible to have any diminution in his nature. All that which is changed arrives to something which it was not before, or ceaseth in part to be what it was before. He would not also be almighty. What is omnipotent cannot be made worse; for to be made worse, is in part to be corrupted. If he be made better, he was not almighty before; something of power was wanting to him. If there should be any change, it must proceed from himself or from another; if from himself, it would be an inability to preserve himself in the perfection of his nature; if from another, he would be inferior in strength, knowledge, and power, to that which changes him, either in his nature, knowledge, or will; in both an inability; an inability in him to continue the same, or an inability in him to resist the power of another.

6. The world could not be ordered and governed but by some Principle or Being which were immutable. Principles are alway more fixed and stable than things which proceed from those principles; and this is true both in morals and naturals. Principles in conscience, whereby men are governed, remain firmly engraven in their minds. The root lies firmly in the earth, while branches are shaken with the wind. The heavens, the cause of generation, are more firm and stable than those things which are wrought by their influence. All things in the world are moved by some power and virtue which is stable; and unless it were so, no order would be observed in motion, no motion could be regularly continued. He could not be a full satisfaction to the infinite desire of the souls of his people. Nothing can truly satisfy the soul of man but rest; and nothing can give it rest but that which is perfect and immutably perfect; for else it would be subject to those agitations and variations which the being it depends upon is subject to. The principle of all things must be immutable, which is described by some by a unity, the principle of number, wherein there is a resemblance of God's unchangeableness. A unit is not variable; it continues in its own nature immutably a unit. It never varies from itself; it cannot be changed from itself; but is, as it were, so omnipotent towards others, that it changes all numbers. If you add any number, it is the beginning of that number, but the unit is not increased by it; a new number ariseth from that addition, but the unit still remains the same, and adds value to other figures, but receives none from them.

III. The third thing to speak to is, that immutability is proper to God, and incommunicable to any creature. Mutability is natural to every creature as a creature, and immutability is the sole perfection of God. He only is infinite wisdom, able to foreknow future events; he only is infinitely powerful, able to call forth all means to effect; so that wanting neither wisdom to contrive, nor strength to execute, he cannot alter his counsel. None being above him, nothing in him contrary to him, and being defective in no blessedness and perfection, he cannot vary in his essence and nature. Had not immutability as well as eternity been a property solely pertaining to the Divine nature, as well as creative power and eternal duration, the apostle's argument to prove Christ to be God from this perpetual sameness, had come short of any convincing strength. These words of the text he applies to Christ (Heb. 1:10-12): "They shall be changed, but thou art the same." There had been no strength in the reason, if immutability by nature did belong to any creature.

The changeableness of all creatures is evident:

1. Of corporeal creatures it is evident to sense. All plants and animals, as they have their duration bounded in certain limits; so while they do exist, they proceed from their rise to their fall. They pass through many sensible alterations, from one degree of growth to another, from buds to blossoms, from blossoms to flowers and fruits. They come to their pitch that nature had set them, and return back to the state from whence they sprung; there is not a day but they make some acquisition, or suffer some loss. They die and spring

up every day; nothing in them more certain than their inconstancy: "The creature is subject to vanity" (Rom. 8:20). The heavenly bodies are changing their place; the sun every day is running his race, and stays not in the same point; and though they are not changed in their essence, yet they are in their place. Some, indeed, say there is a continual generation of light in the sun, as there is a loss of light by the casting out its beams, as in a fountain there is a flowing out of the streams, and a continual generation of supply. And though these heavenly bodies have kept their standing and motion from the time of their creation, yet both the sun's standing still in Joshua's time, and its going back in Hezekiah's time, show that they are changeable at the pleasure of God. But in man the change is perpetually visible; every day there is a change from ignorance to knowledge, from one will to another, from passion to passion, sometimes sad and sometimes cheerful, sometimes craving this, and presently nauseating it; his body changes from health to sickness, or from weakness to strength; some alteration there is either in body or mind. Man, who is the noblest creature, the subordinate end of the creation of other things, cannot assure himself of a consistency and fixedness in anything the short space of a day, no, not of a minute. All his months are months of vanity (Job 7:3); whence the Psalmist calls man at the "best estate altogether vanity," a mere heap of vanity (Psalm 35.) As he contains in his nature the nature of all creatures, so he inherits in his nature the vanity of all creatures. A little world, the centre of the world and of the vanity of the world; yea, "lighter than vanity" (Psalm 62:9), more movable than a feather; tossed between passion and passion, daily changing his end, and changing the means; an image of nothing.

2. Spiritual natures, as angels. They change not in their being, but that is from the indulgence of God. They change not in their goodness, but that is not from their nature, but divine grace in their confirmation; but they change in their knowledge; they know more by Christ than they did by creation (1 Tim. 3:16). They have an addition of knowledge every day, by the providential dispensations of God to his church (Eph. 3:10); and the increase of their astonishment and love is according to the increase of their knowledge and insight. They cannot have a new discovery without new admirations of what is discovered to them: there is a change in their joy when there is a change in a sinner (Luke 15:10). They were changed in their essence, when they were made such glorious spirits of nothing; some of them were changed in their will, when of holy they became impure. The good angels were changed in their understandings, when the glories of God in Christ were presented to their view; and all can be changed in their essence again; and as they were made of nothing, so by the power of God may be reduced to nothing again. So glorified souls shall have an unchanged operation about God, for they shall behold his face without any grief or fear of loss, without vagrant thoughts; but they can never be unchangeable in their nature, because they can never pass from finite to infinite.

No creature can be unchangeable in its nature:—1. Because every creature rose from nothing. As they rose from nothing, so they tend to nothing, unless they are preserved by God. The notion of a creature speaks changeableness; because to be a creature is to be made something of nothing, and, therefore, creation is a change of nothing into something. The being of a creature begins from change, and, therefore, the essence of a creature is subject to change. God only is uncreated, and, therefore, unchangeable. If he were made he could not be immutable; for the very making is a change of not being into being. All creatures were made good, as they were the fruits of God's goodness and power; but must needs be mutable, because they were the extracts of nothing. 2. Because every creature depends purely upon the will of God. They depend not upon themselves, but upon another for their being. As they received their being from the word of his mouth and the arm of his power, so by the same word they can be cancelled into nothing, and return into as little significancy as when they were nothing. He that created them by a word, can by a word destroy them: if God should "take away their breath, they die, and return into their dust" (Psalm 104:29). As it was in the power of the Creator that things might be, before they actually were, so it is in the power of the Creator that things after they are may cease to be what they are; and they are, in their own nature, as reducible to nothing as they were producible by the power of God from nothing; for there needs no more than an act of God's will to null them, as there needed only an act of God's will to make them. Creatures are all subject to a higher cause: they are all reputed as nothing. "He doth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou?" (Dan. 4:35.) But God is unchangeable, because he is the highest good; none above him, all below him; all dependent on him; himself upon none. 3. No creature is absolutely perfect. No creature can be so perfect, or can ever be, but something by the infinite power of God may be added to it; for whatsoever is finite may receive greater additions, and, therefore, a change.

No creature you can imagine, but in your thoughts you may fancy him capable of greater perfections than you know he hath, or than really he hath. The perfections of all creatures are searchable; the perfection of God is only unsearchable (Job 11:6), and, therefore, he only immutable. God only is always the same.

Time makes no addition to him, nor diminisheth anything of him. His nature and essence, his wisdom and will, have always been the same from eternity, and shall be the same to eternity, without any variation.

IV. The fourth thing propounded is, Some propositions to clear this unchangeableness of God from anything that seems contrary to it.

Prop. I. There was no change in God when he began to create the world in time. The creation was a real change, but the change was not subjectively in God, but in the creature; the creature began to be what it was not before. Creation is considered as active or passive. Active creation is the will and power of God to create. This is from eternity, because God willed from eternity to create in time; this never had beginning, for God never began in time to understand anything, to will anything, or to be able to do anything; but he always understood and always willed those things which he determined from eternity to produce in time. The decree of God may be taken for the act decreeing, that is eternal and the same, or for the object decreed, that is in time; so that there may be a change in the object, but not in the will whereby the object doth exist.

1. There was no change in God by the act of creation, because there was no new will in him. There was no new act of his will which was not before. The creation began in time, but the will of creating was from eternity. The work was new, but the decree whence that new work sprung was as ancient as the Ancient of Days. When the time of creating came, God was not made *ex nolente volens*, as we are; for whatsoever God willed to be now done, he willed from eternity to be done; but he willed also that it should not be done till such an instant of time, and that it should not exist before such a time. If God had willed the creation of the world only at that time when the world was produced, and not before, then, indeed, God had been changeable. But though God spake that word which he had not spoke before, whereby the world was brought into act; yet he did not will that will he willed not before. God did not create by a new counsel or new will, but by that which was from eternity (Eph. 1:9). All things are wrought according to that "purpose in himself," an according to "the counsel of his will" (ver. 11); and as the holiness of the elect is the fruit of his eternal will

“before the foundation of the world” (ver. 4), so, likewise, is the existence of things, and of those persons whom he did elect. As when an artificer frames a house or a temple according to that model he had in his mind some years before, there is no change in the model in his mind; the artificer is the same, though the work is produced by him some time after he had framed that copy of it in his own mind, but there is a change of the thing produced by him according to that model. Or, when a rich man intends, four or five years hence, if he lives, to build a hospital, is there any change in will, when, after the expiration of that time, he builds and endows it? Though it be after his will, yet it is the fruit of his precedent will. So God, from all eternity, did will and command that the creatures should exist in such a part of time; and, by his eternal will, all things, whether past, present, or to come, did, do, and shall exist, at that point of time which that will did appoint for them: not, as though God had a new will when things stood up in being, but only that which was prepared in his immutable counsel and will from eternity, doth then appear. There can be no instant fixed from eternity, wherein it can be said, God did not will the creation of the world; for had the will of God for the shortest moment been undetermined to the creation of the world, and afterwards resolved upon it, there had been a moral change in God from not willing to willing; but this there was not, for God executes nothing in time which he had not ordained from eternity, and appointed all the means and circumstances whereby it should be brought about. As the determination of our Saviour to suffer was not a new will, but an eternal counsel, and wrought no change in God (Acts 2:23).

2. There is no change in God by the act of creation, because there was no new power in God. Had God had a will at the time of creation which he had not before, there had been a moral change in him; so had there been in him a power only to create then and not before, there had been a physical change in him from weakness to ability. There can be no more new power in God, than there can be a new will in God; for his will is his power, and what he willet to effect, that he doth effect: as he was unchangeably holy, so he was unchangeably almighty, “which was, and is, and is to come” (Rev. 4:8); which was almighty, and is almighty, and ever will be almighty. The work therefore makes no change in God, but there is a change in the thing wrought by that power of God. Suppose you had a seal engraven upon some metal a hundred years old, or as old as the creation, and you should this day, so many ages after the engraving of it, make an impression of that seal upon wax; would you say the engraving upon the seal were changed, because it produced that stamp upon the wax now which it did not before? No, the change is purely in the wax, which receives a new figure or form by the impression; not in the seal, that was capable of imprinting the same long before. God was the same from eternity as he was when he made a signature of himself upon the creatures by creation, and is no more changed by stamping them into several forms, than the seal is changed by making impression upon the wax. As when a house is enlightened by the sun, or that which was cold is heated by it, there is a change in the house from darkness to light, from coldness to heat; but is there any change in the light and heat of the sun? There is a change in the thing enlightened or warmed by that light and heat which remains fixed and constant in the sun, which was as capable in itself to produce the same effects before, as at that instant when it works them; so when God is the author of a new work, he is not changed, because he works it by an eternal will and an eternal power.

3. Nor is there any new relation acquired by God by the creation of the world. There was a new relation acquired by the creature, as, when a man sins, he hath another relation to God than he had before,—he hath relation to God, as a criminal to a Judge; but there is no change in God, but in the malefactor. The being of men makes no more change in God than the sins of men. As a tree is now on our right hand, and by our turning about it is on our left hand, sometimes before us, sometimes behind us, according to our motion near it or about it, and the turning of the body; there is no change in the tree, which remains firm and fixed in the earth, but the change is wholly in the posture of the body, whereby the tree may be said to be before us or behind us, or on the right hand or on the left hand. God gained no new relation of Lord or Creator by the creation; for though he had created nothing to rule over, yet he had the power to create and rule, though he did not create and rule: as a man may be called a skilful writer, though he does not write, because he is able to do it when he pleases; or a man skilful in physic is called a physician, though he doth not practise that skill, or discover his art in the distribution of medicines, because he may do it when he pleases; it depends upon his own will to show his art when he has a mind to it. So the name Creator and Lord belongs to God from eternity, because he could create and rule, though he did not create and rule. But, howsoever, if there were any such change of relation, that God may be called Creator and Lord after the creation and not before, it is not a change in essence, nor in knowledge, nor in will; God gains no perfection nor diminution by it; his knowledge is not increased by it; he is no more by it than he was, and will be, if all those things ceased; and therefore Austin illustrates it by this similitude:—as a piece of money when it is given as the price of a thing, or deposited only as a pledge for the security of a thing borrowed; the coin is the same, and is not change though the relation it had as a pledge and as a price be different from one another: so that suppose any new relation be added, yet there is nothing happens to the nature of God which may infer any change.

Prop. II. There was no change in the Divine nature of the Son, when he assumed human nature. There was an union of the two natures, but no change of the Deity into the humanity, or of the humanity into the Deity: both preserved their peculiar properties. The humanity was changed by a communication of excellent gifts from the divine nature, not by being brought into an equality with it, for that was impossible that a creature should become equal to the Creator. He took the “form of a servant,” but he lost not the form of God; he despoiled not himself of the perfections of the Deity. He was indeed emptied, “and became of no reputation” (Phil. 2:7); but he did not cease to be God, though he was reputed to be only a man, and a very mean one too. The glory of his divinity was not extinguished nor diminished, though it was obscured and darkened, under the veil of our infirmities; but there was no more change in the hiding of it, than there is in the body of the sun when it is shadowed by the interposition of a cloud.

His blood while it was pouring out from his veins was the “blood of God” (Acts 20:28); and, therefore, when he was bowing the head of his humanity upon the cross, he had the nature and perfections of God; for had he ceased to be God, he had been a mere creature, and his sufferings would have been of as little value and satisfaction as the sufferings of a creature. He could not have been a sufficient Mediator, had he ceased to be God: and he had ceased to be God, had he lost any one perfection proper to the divine nature; and losing none, he lost not this of unchangeableness, which is none of the meanest belonging to the Deity. Why by his union with the human nature should he lose this, any more than he lost his omniscience, which he discovered by his knowledge of the thoughts of men; or his mercy, which he manifested to the height in the time of his suffering? That is truly a change, when a thing ceaseth to be what it was before: this was not in Christ; he assumed our nature without laying aside his own. When the soul is united to the body, doth it lose any of those perfections that are proper to its nature? Is there any change either in the substance or qualities of it? No; but it makes a change in the body, and of a dull lump it makes it a living mass, conveys vigor and strength to it, and, by its power, quickens it to sense and motion. So did the divine nature and human remain entire; there was no change of the one into the other, as Christ by a miracle changed water into wine, or men by art change sand or ashes into glass: and when he prays “for the glory he had with God before the world was” (John 17:5), he prays that a glory he had in his Deity might shine forth in his person as Mediator, and

be evidenced in that height and splendor suitable to his dignity, which had been so lately darkened by his abasement; that as he had appeared to be the Son of Man in the infirmity of the flesh, he might appear to be the Son of God in the glory of his person, that he might appear to be the Son of God and the Son of Man in one person. Again, there could be no change in this union; for, in a real change, something is acquired which was not possessed before, neither formally nor eminently: but the divinity had from eternity, before the incarnation, all the perfections of the human nature eminently in a nobler manner than they are in themselves, and therefore could not be changed by a real union.

Prop. III. Repentance and other affections ascribed to God in Scripture, argue no change in God. We often read of God's repenting, repenting of the good he promised (Jer. 18:10), and of the evil he threatened (Exod. 32:14; John 3:10), or of the work he hath wrought (Gen. 6:6). We must observe, therefore, that,

1. Repentance is not properly in God. He is a pure Spirit, and is not capable of those passions which are signs of weakness and impotence, or subject to those regrets we are subject to. Where there is a proper repentance there is a want of foresight, an ignorance of what would succeed, or a defect in the examination of the occurrences which might fall within consideration. All repentance of a fact is grounded upon a mistake is the event which was not foreseen, or upon an after knowledge of the evil of the thing which was acted by the person repenting. But God is so wise that he cannot err, so holy he cannot do evil; and his certain prescience, or foreknowledge, secures him against any unexpected events. God doth not act but upon clear and infallible reason; and a change upon passion is accounted by all so great a weakness in man, that none can entertain so unworthy a conceit of God. Where he is said to repent (Gen. 6:6), he is also said to grieve; now no proper grief can be imagined to be in God. As repentance is inconsistent with infallible foresight, so is grief no less inconsistent with undefiled blessedness. God is "blessed forever" (Rom. 9:8), and therefore nothing can befall him that can stain that blessedness. His blessedness would be impaired and interrupted while he is repenting, though he did soon rectify that which is the cause of his repentance. "God is of one mind, and who can turn him? what his soul desires that he doth" (Job 23:13).

2. But God accommodates himself in the Scripture to our weak capacity. God hath no more of a proper repentance, than he hath of a real body; though he, in accommodation to our weakness, ascribes to himself the members of our bodies to set out to our understanding the greatness of his perfections, we must not conclude him a body like us; so, because he is said to have anger and repentance, we must not conclude him to have passions like us. When we cannot fully comprehend him as he is, he clothes himself with our nature in his expressions that we may apprehend him as we are able, and by an inspection into ourselves, learn something of the nature of God; yet those human ways of speaking ought to be understood in a manner agreeable to the infinite excellency and majesty of God, and are only designed to mark out something in God which hath a resemblance with something in us; as we cannot speak to God as gods, but as men, so we cannot understand him speaking to us as a God, unless he condescend to speak to us like a man. God therefore frames his language to our dulness, not to his own state, and informs us by our own phrases, what he would have us learn of his nature, as nurses talk broken language to young children. In all such expressions, therefore, we must ascribe the perfection we conceive in them to God, and lay the imperfection at the door of the creature.

3. Therefore, repentance in God is only a change of his outward conduct, according to his infallible foresight and immutable will. He changes the way of his providential proceeding according to the carriage of the creature, without changing his will, which is the rule of his providence. When God speaks of his repenting "that he had made man" (Gen. 6:6), it is only his changing his conduct from a way of kindness to a way of severity, and is a word suited to our capacities to signify his detestation of sin, and his resolution to punish it, after man had made himself quite another thing, than God had made him; "it repents me," that is, I am purposed to destroy the world, as he that repents of his work throws it away; as if a potter cast away the vessel he had framed, it were a testimony that he repented that ever he took pains about it, so the destruction of them seems to be a repentance in God that ever he made them; it is a change of events, not of counsels. Repentance in us is a grief for a former fact, and a changing of our course in it; grief is not in God, but his repentance is a willing a thing should not be as it was, which will was fixed from eternity; for God, foreseeing man would fall, and decreeing to permit it, he could not be said to repent in time of what he did not repent from eternity; and therefore, if there were no repentance in God from eternity, there could be none in time. But God is said to repent when he changes the disposition of affairs without himself; as men, when they repent, alter the course of their actions, so God alters things, *extra se*, or without himself, but changes nothing of his own purpose within himself. It rather notes the action he is about to do, than anything in his own nature, or any change in his eternal purpose.

God's repenting of his kindness is nothing but an inflicting of punishment, which the creature by the change of his carriage hath merited: as his repenting of the evil threatened is the withholding the punishment denounced, when the creature hath humbly submitted to his authority, and acknowledged his crime. Or else we may understand those expressions of joy, and grief, and repentance, to signify thus much, that the things declared to be the objects of joy, and grief, and repentance, are of that nature, that if God were capable of our passions, he would discover himself in such cases as we do; as when the prophets mention the joys and applaudings of heaven, earth, and the sea, they only signify that the things they speak of are so good, that if the heavens and the sea had natures capable of joy, they would express it upon that occasion in such a manner as we do; so would God have joy at the obedience of men, and grief at the unworthy carriage of men, and repent of his kindness when men abuse it, and repent of his punishment when men reform under his rod, were the majesty of his nature capable of such affections.

Prop. IV. The not fulfilling of some predictions in Scripture, which seem to imply a changeableness of the Divine will, do not argue any change in it. As when he reprieved Hezekiah from death, after a message sent by the prophet Isaiah, that he should die (2 Kings 20:1-5; Isa. 38:1-5), and when he made an arrest of that judgment he had threatened by Jonah against Nineveh (Jon. 3:4-10). There is not, indeed, the same reason of promises and threatenings altogether; for in promising, the obligation lies upon God, and the right to demand is in the party that performsthe condition of the promise: but in threatenings, the obligation lies upon the sinner, and God's right to punish is declared thereby; so that through God doth not punish, his will is not changed, because his will was to declare the demerit of sin, and his right to punish upon the commission of it; though he may not punish according to the strict letter of the threatening the person sinning, but relax his own law for the honor of his attributes, and transfer the punishment from the offender to a person substituted in his room: this was the case in the first threatening against man, and the substituting a Surety in the place of the malefactor. But the answer to these cases is this, that where we find predictions in Scripture declared, and yet not executed, we must consider them, not as absolute but conditional, or as the civil law calls it, an interlocutory sentence. God declared what would follow by natural causes, or by the demerit of man, not what he would absolutely himself do: and in many of those predictions,

though the condition be not expressed, yet it is to be understood; so the promises of God are to be understood, with the condition of perseverance in well doing; and threatenings, with a clause of revocation annexed to them, provided that men repent: and this God lays down as a general case, alway to be remembered as a rule for the interpreting his threatenings against a nation, and the same reason will hold in threatenings against a particular person. (Jer. 18:7–10) “At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them;” and so when he speaks of planting a nation, if they do evil, he will repent of the good, &c. It is a universal rule by which all particular cases of this nature are to be tried; so that when man’s repentance arrives, God remains firm in his first will, always equal to himself; and it is not he that changes, but man. For since the interposition of the Mediator, with an eye to whom God governed the world after the fall, the right of punishing was taken off if men repented, and mercy was to flow out, if by a conversion men returned to their duty (Ezek. 18:20, 21). This, I say, is grounded upon God’s entertaining the Mediator; for the covenant of works discovered no such thing as repentance or pardon.

Now these general rules are to be the interpreters of particular cases: so that predictions of good are not to be counted absolute, if men return to evil; nor predictions of evil, if men be thereby reduced to a repentance of their crimes. So Nineveh shall be destroyed, that is, according to the general rule, unless the inhabitants repent, which they did; they manifested a belief of the threatening, and gave glory to God by giving credit to the prophet: and they had a notion of this rule God lays down in the other prophets; for they had an apprehension that, upon their humbling themselves, they might escape the threatened vengeance, and stop the shooting those arrows that were ready in the bow. Though Jonah proclaimed destruction without declaring any hopes of an arrest of judgment, yet their natural notion of God afforded some natural hopes of relief if they did their duty, and spurned not against the prophet’s message; and therefore, saith one, God did not always express this condition, because it was needless; his own rule revealed in Scripture was sufficient to some; and the natural notion all men had of God’s goodness upon their repentance, made it not absolutely necessary to declare it. And besides, saith he, it is bootless; the expressing it can do but little good; secure ones will repent never the sooner, but rather presume upon their hopes of God’s forbearance, and linger out their repentance till it be too late. And to work men to repentance, whom he hath purposed to spare, he threatens them with terrible judgments; which by how much the more terrible and peremptory they are, are likely to be more effectual for that end God in his purpose designs them; viz. to humble them under a sense of their demerit, and an acknowledgment of his righteous justice; and, therefore, though they be absolutely denounced, yet they are to be conditionally interpreted with a reservation of repentance. As for that answer which one gives, that by forty days was not meant forty natural days, but forty prophetic days, that is years, a day for a year; and that the city was destroyed forty years after by the Medes; the expression of God’s repenting upon their humiliation puts a bar to that interpretation; God repented, that is, he did not bring the punishment upon them according to those days the prophet had expressed; and, therefore, forty natural days are to be understood; and if it were meant forty years, and they were destroyed at the end of that term, how could God be said to repent, since according to that, the punishment threatened was, according to the time fixed, brought upon them? and the destruction of it forty years after will not be easily evinced, if Jonah lived in the time of Jeroboam, the second king of Israel, as he did (2 Kings 14:25); and Nineveh was destroyed in the time of Josiah, king of Judah. But the other answer is plain. God did not fulfil what he had threatened, because they reformed what they had committed: when the threatening was made, they were a fit object for justice; but when they repented, they were a fit object for a merciful respite. To threaten when sins are high, is a part of God’s justice; not to execute when sins are revoked by repentance, is a part of God’s goodness. And in the case of Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:1, 5), Isaiah comes with a message from God, that he should “set his house in order,” for he shall die; that is, the disease was mortal, and no outward applications could in their own nature resist the distemper: “Behold, I will add to thy days fifteen years; I will heal thee” (Isa. 38:1, 5). It seems to me to be one entire message, because the latter part of it was so suddenly after the other committed to Isaiah, to be delivered to Hezekiah; for he was not gone out of the king’s house, before he was ordered to return with the news of his health, by an extraordinary indulgence of God against the power of nature and force of the disease, “Behold, I will add to thy life;” noting it as an extraordinary thing; he was in the second court of the king’s house when this word came to him (2 Kings 20:4); the king’s house having three courts, so that he was not gone above half-way out of the palace. God might send this message of death, to prevent the pride Hezekiah might swell with for his deliverance from Sennacherib: as Paul had a messenger of Satan to buffet him to prevent his lifting up (2 Cor. 12:7); and this good man was subject to this sin, as we find afterwards in the case of the Babylonish ambassadors; and God delayed this other part of the message to humble him, and draw out his prayer: and as soon as ever he found Hezekiah in this temper, he sent Isaiah with a comfortable message of recovery; so that the will of God was to signify to him the mortality of his distemper, and afterwards to relieve him by a message of an extraordinary recovery.

Prop. V. God is not changed, when of loving to any creatures he becomes angry with them, or of angry he becomes appeased. The change in these cases is in the creature; according to the alteration in the creature, it stands in a various relation to God: an innocent creature is the object of his kindness, an offending creature is the object of his anger; there is a change in the dispensations of God, as there is a change in the creature making himself capable of such dispensations. God always acts according to the immutable nature of his holiness, and can no more change in his affections to good and evil, than he can in his essence. When the devils, now fallen, stood as glorious angels, they were the objects of God’s love, because holy; when they fell, they were the objects of God’s hatred, because impure; the same reason which made him love them while they were pure, made him hate them when they were criminal. The reason of his various dispensations to them was the same in both, as considered in God, his immutable holiness; but as respecting the creature, different; the nature of the creature was changed, but the Divine holy nature of God remained the same: “With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure, and with the froward, thou wilt show thyself froward” (Psalm 18:26): he is a refreshing light to those that obey him, and a consuming fire to those that resist him. Though the same angels were not always loved, yet the same reason that moved him to love them, moved him to hate them. It had argued a change in God if he had loved them alway, in whatsoever posture they were towards him; it could not be counted love, but a weakness and impotent fondness; the change is in the object, not in the affection of God; for the object loved before is not beloved now, because that which was the motive of love, is not now in it; so that the creature having a different state from what it had, falls under a different affection or dispensation. It had been a mutable affection in God to love that which was not worthy of love with the same love wherewith be loved that which had the greatest resemblance to himself; had God loved the fallen angels in that state and for that state, he had hated himself, because he had loved that which was contrary to himself and the image of his own holiness, which made them appear before, good in his sight. The will of God is unchangeably set to love righteousness and hate iniquity, and from this hatred to punish it; and if a righteous creature contracts the wrath of God, or a sinful creature hath the communications of God’s love, it must be by a change in themselves. Is the sun changed when it hardens one thing and softens another, according to the disposition of the several subjects? Or when the sun makes a flower more fragrant, and a dead carcass more noisome? There are divers effects, but the reason of that diversity is not in the sun, but in the

subject; the sun is the same, and produceth those different effects by the same quality of heat; so if an unholy soul approach to God, God looks angrily upon him; if a holy soul come before him, the same immutable perfection in God draws out his kindness towards him: as some think, the sun would rather refresh than scorch us, if our bodies were of the same nature and substance with that luminary. As the will of God for creating the world was no new, but an eternal will, though it manifested itself in time, so the will of God for the punishment of sin, or the reconciliation of the sinner, was no new will: though his wrath in time break out in the effects of it upon sinners, and his love flows out in the effects of it upon penitents. Christ by his death reconciling God to man, did not alter the will of God, but did what was consonant to his eternal will; he came not to change his will, but to execute his will: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7). And the grace of God in Christ was not a new grace, but an old grace in a new appearance; "the grace of God hath appeared" (Tit. 1:11).

Prop. VI. A change of laws by God argues no change in God, when God abrogates some laws which he had settled in the church, and enacts others. I spake of this something the last day; I shall only add this: God commanded one thing to the Jews, when the church was in an infant state; and removed those laws, when the church came to some growth. The elements of the world were suited to the state of children (Gal. 4:3). A mother feeds not the infant with the same diet as she doth when it is grown up. Our Saviour acquainted not his disciples with some things at one time which he did at another, because they were not able to bear them: where was the change; in Christ's will, or in their growth from a state of weakness to that of strength? A physician prescribes not the same thing to a person in health, as he doth to one conflicting with a distemper; nor the same thing in the beginning as he doth in the state or declination of the disease. The physician's will and skill are the same, but the capacity and necessity of the patient for this or that medicine, or method of proceeding, are not the same. When God changed the ceremonial law, there was no change in the Divine will, but an execution of his will; for when God commanded the observance of the law he intended not the perpetuity of it; nay, in the prophets he declares the cessation of it; he decreed to command it, but he decreed to command it only for such a time; so that the abrogation of it was no less an execution of his decree, than the establishment of it for a season was; the commanding of it was pursuant to his decree for the appointing of it, and the nulling of it was pursuant to his decree of continuing it only for such a season; so that in all this there was no change in the will of God. The counsel of God stands sure; what changes soever there are in the world, are not in God or his will, but in the events of things, and the different relations of things to God: it is in the creature, not in the Creator. The sun always remains of the same hue, and is not discolored in itself, because it shines green through a green glass, and blue through a blue glass; the different colors come from the glass, not from the sun; the change is always in the disposition of the creature, and not in the nature of God or his will.

V. *Use 1.* For information.

1. If God be unchangeable in his nature, and immutability be a property of God, then Christ hath a Divine nature. This in the Psalm is applied to Christ in the Hebrews (Heb. 1:11), where he joins the citation out of this Psalm with that out of Psalm 45:6, 7, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows; and thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth," &c.

As the first must necessarily be meant of Christ the Mediator, and therein he is distinguished from God, as one anointed by him; so the other must be meant of Christ, whereby he is made one with God in regard of the creation and dissolution of the world, in regard of eternity and immutability. Both the testimonies are linked together by the copulative *and*, "and thou, Lord;" declaring thereby that they are both to be understood of the same person, the Son of God. The design of the chapter is to prove Christ to be God; and such things are spoken of him as could not belong to any creature; no, not to the most excellent of the angels. The same person that is said to be anointed above his fellows, and is said to lay the foundation of the earth and heavens, is said to be the same; that is, the same in himself; the prerogative of sameness belongs to that person as well as creation of heaven and earth. The Socinians say it is spoken of God, and that God shall destroy the heavens by Christ; if so, Christ is not a mere creature, not created when he was incarnate; for the same person that shall change the world did create the world; if God shall change the world by him, God also created the world by him; he was then before the world was; for how could God create the world by one that was not; that was not in being till after the creation of the world. 2 The heavens shall be changed, but the person who is to change the heavens is said to be the same, or unchangeable in the creation as well as the dissolution of the world. This sameness refers to the whole sentence. The Psalm wherein the text is, and whence this in the Hebrews is cited, is properly meant of Christ, and redemption by him, and the completing of it at the last day, and not of the Babylonish captivity; that captivity was not so deplorable as the state of the Psalmist describes; Daniel and his companions flourished in that captivity; it could not reasonably be said of them, that their days were consumed like smoke, their hearts withered like grass; that they forgot to "eat their bread" (ver. 3, ver. 4). Besides, he complains of "shortness of life" (ver. 11); but none had any more reason to complain of that in the time of the captivity, than before and after it, than at any other time: their deliverance would contribute nothing to the natural length of their lives. Besides, when Sion should be built, the heathen should "fear the name of the Lord" (that is, worship God), and "all the kings of the earth his glory" (ver. 15). The rearing the second temple after the deliverance, did not proselyte the nations; nor did the kings of the earth worship the glory of God; nor did God appear in such glory at the erecting the second temple.

The second temple was less glorious than the first, for it wanted some of the ornaments which were the glory of the first; but it is said of this state, that when the Lord should build up Sion, he should "appear in his glory" (ver. 16); his proper glory, and extraordinary glory. Now that God who shall appear in glory, and build up Sion, is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world; he builds up the church, he causes the nations to fear the Lord, and the kings of the earth his glory; he broke down the partition wall, and opened a door for the entrance of the Gentiles; he struck the chains from off the prisoners, and loosed those that were appointed to death by the curse of the law (ver. 20): and to this person is ascribed the creation of the world; and he is pronounced to remain the same in the midst of an infinite number of changes in inferior things. And it is likely the Psalmist considers not only the beginning of redemption, but the completing of it at the second coming of Christ; for he complains of those evils which shall be removed by his second coming, viz., the shortness of life, persecutions and reproaches wherewith the church is afflicted in this world; and comforts not himself with those attributes which are directly opposed to sin, as the mercy of God, the covenant of God, but with those that are opposed to mortality and calamities, as the unchangeableness and eternity of God; and from thence infers a perpetual establishment of believers. "The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee" (ver. 28): so that the Psalm itself seems to aim in the whole discourse at Christ, and asserts his divinity, which the apostle, as an interpreter, doth fully evidence; applying it to him, and manifesting his deity by his immutability as well as eternity. While all other things lose their forms, and pass through multitudes of variations, he constantly remains the same, and shall be the same, when all the empires of the world shall slide away,

and a period be put to the present motions of the creation: and as there was no change made in his being by the creation of things, so neither shall there be by the final alteration of things; he shall see them finish, as he saw them rise up into being, and be the same after their reign, as he was before their original; he is the first and the last (Rev. 1:17).

2. Here is ground and encouragement for worship. An atheist will make another use of this; if God be immutable, why should we worship him, why should we pray to him? good will come if he wills it; evil cannot be averted by all our supplications, if he hath ordained it to fall upon us. But certainly since unchangeableness is knowing, and willing goodness is a perfection, an adoration and admiration is due to God, upon the account of this excellency. If he be God, he is to be revered, and the more highly revered, because he cannot but be God. Again, what comfort could it be to pray to a God, that like the chameleon changed colors every day, every moment? What encouragement could there be to lift up our eyes to one that were of one mind this day and of another mind tomorrow? Who would put up a petition to an earthly prince that were so mutable, as to grant a petition one day and deny it another, and change his own act? But if a prince promise this or that thing upon such or such a condition, and you know his promise to be as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, would any man reason thus? because it is unchangeable we will not seek to him, we will not perform the condition, upon which the fruit of the proclamation is to be enjoyed. Who would not count such an inference ridiculous? What blessings hath not God promised upon the condition of seeking him? Were he of an unrighteous nature, or changeable in his mind, this would be a bar to our seeking him, and frustrate our hopes; but since it is otherwise, is not this excellency of his nature the highest encouragement, to ask of him the blessings he hath promised, and a beam from heaven to fire our zeal in asking? If you sire things against his will, which he hath declared he will not grant, prayer then would be an act of disobedience and injury to him, as well as an act of folly in itself; his unchangeableness then might stifle such desires: but if we ask according to his will, and according to our reasonable wants, what ground have we to make such a ridiculous argument? He hath willed everything that may be for our good, if we perform the condition he hath required; and hath put it upon record, that we may know it and regulate our desires and supplications according to it. If we will not seek him, his immutability cannot be a bar, but our own folly is the cause; and by our neglect we despoil him of this perfection as to us, and either imply that he is not sincere, and means not as he speaks; or that he is as changeable as the wind, sometimes this thing, sometimes that, and not at all to be confided in. If we ask according to his revealed will, the unchangeableness of his nature will assure us of the grant; and what a presumption would it be in a creature dependent upon his sovereign, to ask that which he knows he has declared his will against; since there is no good we can want, but he hath promised to give, upon our sincere and ardent desire for it? God hath decreed to give this or that to man, but conditionally, and by the means of inquiring after him, and asking for it: "Ask, and you shall receive" (Ezek. 36:37; Matt. 7:7): as much as to say, You shall not receive unless you ask.

When the highest promises are made, God expects they should be put in suit; our Saviour joins the promise and the petition together; the promise to encourage the petition, and the petition to enjoy the promise: he doth not say perhaps it shall be given, but it shall, that is, it certainly shall; your heavenly Father is unchangeably willing to give you those things. We must depend upon his immutability for the thing, and submit to his wisdom for the time. Prayer is an acknowledgment of our dependence upon God; which dependence could have no firm foundation without unchangeableness. Prayer doth not desire any change in God, but is offered to God that he would confer those things which he hath immutably willed to communicate; but he willed them not without prayer as the means of bestowing them. The light of the sun is ordered for our comfort, for the discovery of visible things, for the ripening the fruits of the earth; but withal it is required that we use our faculty of seeing, that we employ our industry in sowing and planting, and expose our fruits to the view of the sun, that they may receive the influence of it. If a man shuts his eyes, and complains that the sun is changed into darkness, it would be ridiculous; the sun is not changed, but we alter ourselves; nor is God changed in not giving us the blessings he hath promised, because he hath promised in the way of a due address to him, and opening our souls to receive his influence, and to this, his immutability is the greatest encouragement.

3. This shows how contrary man is to God in regard of his inconstancy. What an infinite distance is there between the immutable God, and mutable man, and how should we bewail this flittingness in our nature! There is a mutability in us as creatures, and a creature cannot but be mutable by nature, otherwise it were not a creature but God. The establishment of any creature is from grace and gift; naturally we tend to nothing, as we come from nothing. This creature-mutability is not our sin, yet it should cause us to lie down under a sense of our own nothingness, in the presence of the Creator. The angels as creatures, though not corrupt, cover their faces before him: and the arguments God uses to humble Job, though a fallen creature, are not from his corruption: for I do not remember that he taxed him with that; but from the greatness of his majesty and excellency of his nature declared in his works (Job 38–41.); and, therefore, men that have no sense of God and humility before him, forget that they are creatures as well as corrupt ones. How great is the distance between God and us, in regard of our inconstancy in good, which is not natural to us by creation: for the mind and affections were regular, and by the great artificer were pointed to God as the object of knowledge and love. We have the same faculties of understanding, will, and affection, as Adam had in innocence; but not with the same light, the same bias, and the same ballast. Man, by his fall, wounded his head and heart; the wound in his head made him unstable in the truth, and that in his heart unsteadfast in his affections: he changed himself from the image of God to that of the devil, from innocence to corruption, and from an ability to be steadfast to a perpetual inconstancy; "his silver became dross, and his wine was mixed with water" (Isa. 1:22). He changed,

(1.) To inconstancy in truth, opposed to the immutability of knowledge in God. How are our minds floating between ignorance and knowledge! Truth in us is like those ephemera, creatures of a day's continuance,—springs up in the morning, and expires at night. How soon doth that fly away from us which we have had, not only some weak flashes of, but which we have learned and have had some relish of! The devil stood not in the truth (John 8:44), and therefore manages his engines to make us as unstable as himself: our minds reel, and corrupt reasonings overweigh us; like sponges we suck up water, and a light compression makes us spout it out again. Truths are not engraven upon our hearts, but writ as in dust, defaced by the next puff of wind, "carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14); like a ship without a pilot and sails, at the courtesy of the next storm, or like clouds that are tenants to the wind and sun, moved by the wind and melted by the sun. The Galatians were no sooner called into the grace of God, but they were removed from it (Gal. 1:6); some have been reported to have *menstruam fidem*, kept an opinion for a month; and many are like him that believed the soul's immortality no longer than he had Plato's book of that subject in his hand: one likens such to children; they play with truths as children do with babies, one while embrace them, and a little after throw them into the dirt. How soon do we forget what the truth is delivered to us, and what it represented us to be (James 1:23, 24). Is it not a thing to be bewailed, that man should be such a weathercock, turned about with every breath of wind, and shifting aspects as the wind shifts points?

(2.) Inconstancy in will, and affections opposed to the immutability of will in God. We waver between God and Baal; and while we are not only resolving, but upon motion a little way, look back with a hankering after Sodom; sometimes lifted up with heavenly intentions, and presently cast down with earthly cares, like a ship that by an advancing wave seems to aspire to heaven, and the next fall of the waves makes it sink down to the depths. We change purposes oftener than fashions, and our resolutions are like letters in water, whereof no mark remains; we will be as John to-day to love Christ, and as Judas to-morrow to betray him, and, by an unworthy levity, pass into the camp of the enemies of God; resolved to be as holy as angels in the morning, when the evening beholds us as impure as devils. How often do we hate what before we loved, and shun what before we longed for! and our resolutions are like vessels of crystal, which break at the first knock, are dashed in pieces by the next temptation. Saul resolved not to persecute David any more, but you soon find him upon his old game. Pharaoh more than once promised, and probably resolved, to let Israel go, but at the end of the storm his purposes vanish (Exod. 8:27, 32).

When an affliction pincheth men, they intend to change their course, and the next news of ease changes their intentions; like a bow not fully bent in their inclinations, they cannot reach the mark, but live many years between resolutions of obedience and affections to rebellion (Psalm 78:17): and what promises men make to God are often the fruit of their passion, their fear, not of their will. The Israelites were startled at the terrors wherewith the law was delivered, and promised obedience (Exod. 20:19), but a month after forgot them, and make a golden calf, and in the sight of Sinai call for, and dance before, their gods (Exod. 32.); never people more unconstant. Peter, who vowed an allegiance to his Master, and a courage to stick to him, forswears him almost with the same breath. Those that cry out with a zeal, "The Lord he is God," shortly after return to the service of their idols (1 Kings 18:39). That which seems to be our pleasure this day, is our vexation to-morrow; a fear of a judgment puts us into a religious pang, and a love to our lusts reduceth us to a rebellious inclination; as soon as the danger is over, the saint is forgotten: salvation and damnation present themselves to us, touch us, and engender some weak wishes, which are dissolved by the next allurements of a carnal interest. No hold can be taken of our promises, no credit is to be given to our resolutions.

(3.) Inconstancy in practice. How much beginning in the Spirit, and ending in the flesh; one day in the sanctuary, another in the stews; clear in the morning as the sun, and clouded before noon; in heaven by an excellency of gifts, in hell by a course of profaneness; like a flower, which some mention, that changes its color three times a day, one art white, then purple, then yellow! The spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh quickly triumphs over the spirit. In a good man how often is there a spiritual lethargy; though he doth not openly defame God, yet he doth not always glorify him; he doth not forsake the truth, but he doth not always make the attainment of it, and settlement in it his business. This levity discovers itself in religious duty, "when I would do good, evil is present with me" (Rom. 7:21). Never more present, than when we have a mind to do good, and never more present than when we have a mind to do the best and greatest good. How hard is it to make our thoughts and affections keep their stand! place them upon a good object, and they will be frisking from it, as a bird from one bough, one fruit, to another: we vary postures according to the various objects we meet with. The course of the world is a very airy thing, suited to the uncertain notions of that "prince of the power of the air," which works in it (Eph. 2:2). This ought to be bewailed by us. Though we may stand fast in the truth, though we may spin our resolutions into a firm web, though the spirit may triumph over the flesh in our practice, yet we ought to bewail it, because inconstancy is our nature, and what fixedness we have in good is from grace. What we find practised by most men is natural to all; "as face answers to face in a glass, so doth heart to heart" (Prov. 27:19); a face in the glass is not more like a natural face, whose image it is, than one man's heart is naturally like another.

1st. It is natural to those out of the church. Nebuchadnezzar is so affected with Daniel's prophetic spirit, that he would have none accounted the true God, but the "God of Daniel" (Dan. 2:47). How soon doth this notion slip from him, and an image must be set up for all to worship, upon pain of a most cruel, painful death! Daniel's God is quite forgotten. The miraculous deliverance of the three children, for not worshipping his image, makes him settle a decree to secure the honor of God from the reproach of his subjects (Dan. 3:29); yet, a little while after, you have him strutting in his palace, as if there were no God but himself.

2d. It is natural to those in the Church. The Israelites were the only church God had in the world, and a notable example of inconsistency. After the miracles of Egypt, they murmured against God, when they saw Pharaoh marching with an army at their heels. They desired food, and soon nauseated the manna they were before fond of. When they came into Canaan, they sometimes worshipped God, and sometimes idols, not only the idols of one nation, but of all their neighbors. In which regard God calls this, his heritage; "a speckled bird" (Jer. 12:9); a peacock, saith Hierom, inconstant, made up of varieties of idolatrous colors and ceremonies. This levity of spirit is the root of all mischief; it scatters our thoughts in the service of God; it is the cause of all revolts and apostasies from him; it makes us unfit to receive the communications of God whatsoever we hear is like words writ in sand, ruffled out by the next gale; whatsoever is put into us is like precious liquor in a palsy hand, soon spilt: it breeds distrust of God when we have an uncertain judgment of him, we are not like to confide in him; an uncertain judgment will be followed with a distrustful heart. In fine, where it is prevalent, it is a certain sign of ungodliness. To be driven with the wind like chaff, and to be ungodly, is all one in the judgment of the Holy Ghost (Psalm 1:4); the ungodly are "like the chaff which the wind drives away," which signifies not their destruction, but their disposition, for their destruction is inferred from it (ver. 5), "therefore the ungodly shall not stand in judgment." How contrary is this to the unchangeable God, who is always the same, and would have us the same, in our religious promises and resolutions for good!

4. If God be immutable, it is sad news to those that are resolved in wickedness, or careless of returning to that duty he requires. Sinners must not expect that God will alter his will, make a breach upon his nature, and violate his own word to gratify their lusts. No, it is not reasonable God should dishonor himself to secure them, and cease to be God, that they may continue to be wicked, by changing his own nature, that they may be unchanged in their vanity. God is the same; goodness is as amiable in his sight, and sin as abominable in his eyes now, as it was at the beginning of the world. Being the same God, he is the same enemy to the wicked as the same friend to the righteous. He is the same in knowledge, and cannot forget sinful acts. He is the same in will, and cannot approve of unrighteous practices. Goodness cannot but be always the object of his love, and wickedness cannot but be always the object of his hatred: and as his aversion to sin is always the same, so as he hath been in his judgments upon sinners, the same he will be still; for the same perfection of immutability belongs to his justice for the punishment of sin, as to his holiness for his disaffection to sin. Though the covenant of works was changeable by the crime of man violating it, yet it was unchangeable in regard of God's justice vindicating it, which is inflexible in the punishment of the breaches of his law. The law had a preceptive part, and a minatory part: when man changed the observation of the precept, the righteous nature of God could not null the execution of the threatening; he could not, upon the account of this perfection, neglect his just word, and countenance the unrighteous transgression. Though there were no

more rational creatures in being but Adam and Eve, yet God subjected them to that death he had assured them of: and from this immutability of his will, ariseth the necessity of the suffering of the Son of God for the relief of the apostate creature. His will in the second covenant is as unchangeable as that in the first, only repentance is settled as the condition of the second, which was not indulged in the first; and without repentance, the sinner must irrevocably perish, or God must change his nature: there must be a change in man; there can be none in God; his bow is bent, his arrows are ready, if the wicked do not turn (Psalm 7:11). There is not an atheist, an hypocrite, a profane person, that ever was upon the earth, but God's soul abhorred him as such, and the like he will abhor forever; while any therefore continue so, they may sooner expect the heavens should roll as they please, the sun stand still at their order, the stars change their course at their beck, than that God should change his nature, which is opposite to profaneness and vanity; "Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" (Job 9:4.)

Use 2. Of comfort. The immutability of a good God is a strong ground of consolation. Subjects wish a good prince to live forever, as being loth to change him, but care not how soon they are rid of an oppressor. This unchangeableness of God's will shows him as ready to accept any that come to him as ever he was; so that we may with confidence make our address to him, since he cannot change his affections to goodness. The fear of change in a friend hinders a full reliance upon him; an assurance of stability encourages hope and confidence. This attribute is the strongest prop for faith in all our addresses; it is not a single perfection, but the glory of all those that belong to his nature; for he is unchangeable in his love (Jer. 31:3), in his truth (Psalm 117:2). The more solemn revelation of himself in this name, Jehovah, which signifies chiefly his eternity and immutability, was to support the Israelites' faith in expectation of a deliverance from Egypt, that he had not retracted his purpose, and his promise made to Abraham for giving Canaan to his posterity (Exod. 3:14-17). Herein is the basis and strength of all his promises; therefore, saith the Psalmist, "Those that know thy name, will put their trust in thee" (Psalm 9:10); those that are spiritually acquainted with thy name, Jehovah, and have a true sense of it upon their hearts, will put their trust in thee. His goodness could not be distrusted, if his unchangeableness were well apprehended and considered. All distrust would fly before it, as darkness before the sun; it only gets advantage of us when we are not well grounded in his name; and if ever we trusted God, we have the same reason to trust him forever: (Isa. 26:4) "Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength;" or, as it is in the Hebrew, "a Rock of Ages," that is, perpetually unchangeable. We find the traces of God's immutability in the creatures. He has, by his peremptory decree, set bounds to the sea: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:11). Do we fear the sea overflowing us in this island? No, because of his fixed decree. And is not his promise in his Word as unchangeable as his word concerning inanimate things, as good a ground to rest upon?

1. The covenant stands unchangeable. Mutable creatures break their leagues and covenants, and snap them asunder like Samson's cords, when they are not accommodated to their interests. But an unchangeable God keeps his: "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, nor shall the covenant of my peace be removed" (Isa. 54:10). The heaven and earth shall sooner fall asunder, and the strongest and firmest parts of the creation crumble to dust, sooner than one iota of my covenant shall fail. It depends upon the unchangeableness of his will and the unchangeableness of his word, and, therefore, is called "the immutability of his counsel" (Heb. 6:17). It is the fruit of the everlasting purpose of God; whence the apostle links purpose and grace together (2 Tim. 1:9). A covenant with a nation may be changeable, because it may not be built upon the eternal purpose of God, "to put his fear in the heart;" but with respect to the creature's obedience. Thus God chose Jerusalem as the place wherein he would "dwell forever" (Psalm 132:14), yet he threatens to depart from them when they had broken covenant with him; "and the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city to the mountain on the east side" (Ezek. 11:33). The covenant of grace doth not run, "I will be your God if you will be my people;" but "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Hos. 2:19, &c.) "I will betroth thee to me forever; I, will say, Thou art my people, and they shall say, Thou art my God." His everlasting purpose is, to write his laws in the hearts of the elect. He puts a condition to his covenant of grace, the condition of faith, and he resolves to work that condition in the hearts of the elect; and, therefore, believers have two immutable pillars for their support, stronger than those erected by Solomon at the porch of the temple (1 Kings 7:21), called Jakin and Boaz, to note the firmness of that building dedicated to God; these are election, or the standing. counsel of God, and the covenant of grace. He will not revoke the covenant, and blot the names of his elect out of the book of life.

2. Perseverance is ascertained. It consists not with the majesty of God to call a person effectually to himself to-day, to make him fit for his eternal love, to give him faith, and take away that faith to-morrow. His effectual call is the fruit of his eternal election, and that counsel hath no other foundation but his constant and unchangeable will; a foundation that stands sure, and, therefore, called the foundation of God, and not of the creature; "the foundation of God stands sure, the Lord knows who are his" (2 Tim. 2:19). It is not founded upon our own natural strength; it may be then subject to change, as all the products of nature are. The fallen angels had created grace in their innocency, but lost it by their fall. Were this the foundation of the creature, it might soon be shaken; since man, after his revolt, can ascribe nothing constant to himself, but his own inconstancy. But the foundation is not in the infirmity of nature, but the strength of grace, and of the grace of God, who is immutable, who wants not virtue to be able, nor kindness to be willing, to reserve his own foundation. To what purpose doth our Saviour tell his disciples their names "were written in heaven" (Luke 10:20), but to mark the infallible certainty of their salvation by an opposition to those things which perish, and have their "names written in the earth" (Jer. 17:23); or upon the sand, where they may be defaced? And why should Christ order his disciples to rejoice that their names were written in heaven, if God were changeable to blot them out again? or why should the apostle assure us, that though God had rejected the greatest part of the Jews, he had not, therefore, rejected his people elected according to his purpose and immutable counsel; because there are none of the elect of God but will come to salvation? For, saith he, the "election hath obtained it" (Rom. 11:7); that is, all those that are of the election have obtained it, and the others are hardened. Where the seal of sanctification is stamped, it is a testimony of God's election, and that foundation shall stand sure: "The foundation of the Lord stands sure, having this seal, the Lord knows who are his;" that is the foundation, the "naming the name of Christ," or believing in Christ, and "departing from iniquity," is the seal. As it is impossible when God calls those things that are not, but that they should spring up into being and appear before him; so it is impossible but that the seed of God, by his eternal purpose, should be brought to a spiritual life, and that calling cannot be retracted; for that "gift and calling is without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). And when repentance is removed from God in regard of some works, the immutability of those works is declared; and the reason of that immutability is their pure dependence on the eternal favor and unchangeable grace of God "purposed in himself" (Eph. 1:9, 11), and not upon the mutability of the creature. Hence their happiness is not as patents among men, *quam diu bene se gesserint*, so long as they behave themselves well; but they have a promise that they shall behave themselves so as never wholly to depart from God (Jer. 32:40): "I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good, but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not

depart from me.” God will not turn from them, to do them good, and promiseth that they shall not turn from him forever, or forsake him. And the bottom of it is the everlasting covenant, and, therefore, believing and sealing for security are linked together (Eph. 1:13). And when God doth inwardly teach us his law, he puts in a will not to depart from it: (Psalm 119:102) “I have not departed from thy judgments;” what is the reason? “For thou hast taught me.”

3. By this eternal happiness is insured. This is the inference made from the eternity and unchangeableness of God in the verse following the text (ver. 28): “The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.” This is the sole conclusion drawn from those perfections of God solemnly asserted before. The children which the prophets and apostles have begotten to thee, shall be totally delivered from the relics of their apostasy, and the punishment due to them, and rendered partakers of immortality with thee, as sons to dwell in their Father’s house forever. The Spirit begins a spiritual life here, to fit for an immutable life in glory hereafter, where believers shall be placed upon a throne that cannot be shaken, and possess a crown that shall not be taken off their heads forever.

Use 3. Of exhortation. 1. Let a sense of the changeableness and uncertainty of all other things beside God, be upon us. There are as many changes as there are figures in the world. The whole fashion of the world is a transient thing; every man may say as Job, “Changes and war are against me” (Job 10:17). Lot chose the plain of Sodom, because it was the richer soil. He was but a little time there before he was taken prisoner, and his substance made the spoil of his enemies. That is again restored; but a while after, fire from heaven devours his wealth, though his person was secured from the judgment by a special Providence. We burn with a desire to settle ourselves, but mistake the way, and build castles in the air, which vanish like bubbles of soap in water. And, therefore,

(1.) Let not our thoughts dwell much upon them. Do but consider those souls that are in the possession of an unchangeable God, that behold his never-fading glory! Would it not be a kind of hell to them to have their thoughts starting out to these things, or find any desire in themselves to the changeable trifles of the earth? Nay, have we not reason to think that they cover their faces with shame, that ever they should have such a weakness of spirit when they were here below, as to spend more thoughts upon them than were necessary for this present life; much more that they should at any time value and court them above an unchangeable good? Do they not disdain themselves that they should ever debase the immutable perfections of God, as to have neglecting thoughts of him at any time, for the entertainment of such a mean and inconstant rival?

(2.) Much less should we trust in them, or rejoice in them. The best things are mutable, and things of such a nature are not fit objects of confidence. Trust not in riches, they have their wanes as well as increases; they rise sometimes like a torrent, and flow in upon men, but resemble also a torrent in as sudden a fall and departure, and leave nothing but slime behind them. Trust not in honor; all the honor and applause in the world is no better than an inheritance of wind, which the pilot is not sure of, but shifts from one corner to another, and stands not perpetually in the same point of the heavens. How, in a few ages did the house of David, a great monarch, and a man after God’s own heart, descend to a mean condition, and all the glory of that house shut up in the stock of a carpenter? David’s sheep-hook was turned into a sceptre, and the sceptre by the same hand of Providence turned into a hatchet in Joseph his descendant. Rejoice not immoderately in wisdom; that, and learning languish with age. A wound in the head may impair that which is the glory of man. If an organ be out of frame, folly may succeed, and all a man’s prudence be wound up in an irrecoverable dotage. Nebuchadnezzar was no fool, yet, by a sudden hand of God, he became not only a fool or a madman, but a kind of brute. Rejoice not in strength; that decays, and a mighty man may live to see his strong arm withered, and a grasshopper to become a burthen (Eccles. 12:5): “The strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders shall cease because they are few” (ver. 3): nor rejoice in children; they are like birds upon a tree, that make a little chirping music, and presently fall into the fowler’s net. Little did Job expect such sad news as the loss of all his progeny at a blow, when the messenger knocked at his gate; and such changes happen oftentimes when our expectations of comfort, and a contentment in them, are at the highest. How often doth a string crack when the musician hath wound it up to a just height for a tune, and all his pains and delight marred in a moment! Nay, all these things change while we are using them, like ice that melts between our fingers, and flowers that wither while we are smelling to them. The apostle gave them a good title when he called them “uncertain riches,” and thought it a strong argument to dissuade them from trusting in them (1 Tim. 6:17). The wealth of the merchant depends upon the winds and waves, and the revenue of the husbandman upon the clouds; and since they depend upon those things which are used to express the most changeableness, they can be no fit object for trust. Besides, God sometimes kindles a fire under all a man’s glory, which doth insensibly consume it (Isa. 10:16); and while we have them, the fear of losing them renders us not very happy in the fruition of them; we can scarce tell whether they are contentments or no, because sorrow follows them so close at the heels. It is not an unnecessary exhortation for good men; the best men have been apt to place too much trust in them. David thought himself immutable in his prosperity, and such thoughts could not be without some immoderate outlets of the heart to them, and confidences in them; and Job promised himself to die in his nest, and “multiply his days as the sand,” without any interruption (Job 29:18, 19, &c.); but he was mistaken and disappointed. Let me add this: trust not in men, who are as inconstant as anything else, and often change their most ardent affections into implacable hatred; and though their affections may not be changed, the power to help you may. Haman’s friends, that depended on him one day, were crest-fallen the next, when their patron was to exchange his chariot of state for an ignominious gallows.

(3.) Prefer an immutable God before mutable creatures. Is it not a horrible thing to see what we are, and what we possess, daily crumbling to dust, and in a continual flux from us, and not seek out something that is permanent, and always abide the same, for our portion? In God, or Wisdom, which is Christ, there is substance (Prov. 8:21), in which respect he is opposed to all the things in the world, that are but shadows, that are shorter or longer, according to the motion of the sun; mutable also, by every little body that intervenes. God is subject to no decay within, to no force without; nothing in his own nature can change him from what he is, and there is no power above can hinder him from being what he will to the soul. He is an ocean of all perfection: he wants nothing without himself to render him blessed, which may allure him to a change. His creatures can want nothing out of him to make them happy, whereby they may be enticed to prefer anything before him. If we enjoy other things, it is by God’s donation, who can as well withdraw them as bestow them; and it is but a reasonable, as well as a necessary thing, to endeavor the enjoyment of the immutable Benefactor, rather than his revocable gifts. If the creatures had a sufficient virtue in themselves to ravish our thoughts and engross our souls; yet when we take a prospect of a fixed and unchangeable Being, what beauty, what strength have any of those things to vie with him? How can they bear up and maintain their interest against a lively thought and sense of God? All the glory of them would fly before him like that of the stars before the sun. They were once nothing, they may be nothing again; as their own nature brought them not out of nothing, so their nature secures them not from being reduced to nothing. What an unhappiness is it to have our affections set upon that which retains something of its *non esse* with its *esse*, its not being with its being; that lives indeed, but in a

continual flux, and may lose that pleasurable to-morrow which charms us to-day?

2. This doctrine will teach us patience under such providences as declare his unchangeable will. The rectitude of our wills consists in conformity to the Divine, as discovered in his words, and manifested in his providence, which are the effluxes of his immutable will. The time of trial is appointed by his immutable will (Dan. 11:35); it is not in the power of the sufferer's will to shorten it, nor in the power of the enemies' will to lengthen it. Whatsoever doth happen hath been decreed by God (Eccles. 6:10), "That which hath been is named already;" therefore to murmur or be discontented is to contend with God, who is mightier than we, to maintain his own purposes. God doth act all things conveniently for that immutable end intended by himself, and according to the reason of his own will, in the true point of time most proper for it and for us, not too soon or too slow, because he is unchangeable in knowledge and wisdom. God doth not act anything barely by an immutable will, but by an immutable wisdom, and an unchangeable rule of goodness; and, therefore, we should not only acquiesce in what he works, but have a complacency in it; and by having our wills thus knitting themselves with the immutable will of God, we attain some degree of likeness to him in his own unchangeableness. When, therefore, God hath manifested his will in opening his decree to the world by his work of providence, we must cease all disputes against it, and, with Aaron hold our peace, though the affliction be very smart (Rev. 10:3). "All flesh must be silent before God" (Zech. 2:13); for whatsoever is his counsel shall stand, and cannot be recalled. All struggling against it is like a brittle glass contending with a rock; for "if he cut off and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him?" (Job 11:10.) Nothing can help us, if he hath determined to afflict us, as nothing can hurt us, if he hath determined to secure us. The more clearly God hath evidenced this or that to be his will, the more sinful is our struggling against it. Pharaoh's sin was the greater in keeping Israel, by how much the more God's miracles had been demonstrations of his settled will to deliver them. Let nothing snatch our hearts to a contradiction to him, but let us fear and give glory to him, when the hour of judgment which he hath appointed is come (Rev. 14:7); that is, comply with the unchangeable will of his precept, the more he declares the immutable will of his providence. We must not think God must disgrace his nature and change his proceedings for us; better the creature should suffer, than God be impaired in any of his perfections. If God changed his purpose he would change his nature. Patience is the way to perform the immutable will of God, and a means to attain a gracious immutability for ourselves by receiving the promise (Heb. 10:36), "Ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

3. This doctrine will teach us to imitate God in this perfection, by striving to be immovable in goodness. God never goes back from himself; he finds nothing better than himself for which he should change; and can we find anything better than God, to allure our hearts to a change from him? The sun never declines from the ecliptic line, nor should we from the paths of holiness. A steadfast obedience is encouraged by an unchangeable God to reward it (1 Cor. 15:58): "Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord." Unsteadfastness is the note of a hypocrite (Psalm 78:37): steadfastness in that which is good is the mark of a saint; it is the character of a righteous person to "keep the truth" (Isa. 26:2). And it is as positively said that "he that abides not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God" (2 John 9); but he that doth, "hath both the Father and the Son." So much of uncertainty, so much of nature, so much of firmness in duty, so much of grace. We can never honor God unless we finish his work; as Christ did not glorify God but in finishing the work God gave him to do (John 17:4). The nearer the world comes to an end, the more is God's immutability seen in his promises and predictions, and the more must our unchangeableness be seen in our obedience (Heb. 10:23, 25): "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and so much the more as you see the day approaching." The christian Jews were to be the more tenacious of their faith, the nearer they saw the day approaching, the day of Jerusalem's destruction prophesied of by Daniel (Dan. 9:26), which accomplishment must be a great argument to establish the christian Jews in the profession of Christ to be the Messiah, because the destruction of the city was not to be before the cutting off the Messiah. Let us be, therefore, constant in our profession and service of God, and not suffer ourselves to be driven from him by the ill usage, or flattered from him by the caresses of the world.

(1.) It is reasonable. If God be unchangeable in doing us good, it is reason we should be unchangeable in doing him service. If he assure us that he is our God, our "I Am," he would also that we should be his people; his we are. If he declare himself constant in his promises, he expects we should be so in our obedience. As a spouse, we should be unchangeably faithful to him as a Husband; as subjects, have an unchangeable allegiance to him as our Prince. He would not have us faithful to him for an hour or a day, but "to the death" (Rev. 2:10); and it is reason we should be his, and if we be his children, imitate him in his constancy of his holy purposes.

(2.) It is our glory and interest. To be a reed shaken with every wind is no commendation among men, and it is less a ground of praise with God. It was Job's glory that he held fast his integrity (Job 1:22): "In all this Job sinned not," in all this,—which whole cities and kingdoms would have thought ground enough of high exclamations against God, and also against the temptation of his wife,—he retained his integrity (Job 2:9): "Dost thou still retain thy integrity?" The devil, who by God's permission stripped him of his goods and health, yet could not strip him of his grace. As a traveller, when the wind and snow beats in his face, wraps his cloak more closely about him to preserve that and himself. Better we had never made profession, than afterwards to abandon it; such a withering profession serves for no other use than to aggravate the crime, if any of us fly like a coward, or revolt like a traitor; what profit will it be to a soldier, if he hath withstood many assaults, and turn his back at last? If we would have God crown us with an immutable glory, we must crown our beginnings with a happy perseverance (Rev. 2:10): "Be faithful to the death, and I will give thee a crown of life;" not as though this were the cause to merit it, but a necessary condition to possess it: constancy in good is accompanied with an immutability of glory.

(3.) By an unchangeable disposition to good, we should begin the happiness of heaven upon earth. This is the perfection of blessed spirits, those that are nearest to God as angels and glorified souls, they are immutable; not, indeed, by nature, but by grace; yet not only by a necessity of grace, but a liberty of will: grace will not let them change; and that grace doth animate their wills that they would not change; an immutable God fills their understandings and affections, and gives satisfaction to their desires. The saints when they were below, tried other things, and found them deficient; but now they are so fully satisfied with the beatific vision, that if Satan should have an entrance among the angels and sons of God, it is not likely he should have any influence upon them; he could not present to their understandings anything that could either at the first glance, or upon a deliberate view, be preferable to what they enjoy and are fixed in. Well, then, let us be immovable in the knowledge and love of God. It is the delight of God to see his creatures resemble him in what they are able. Let not our affections to him be as Jonah's gourd, growing up in one night and withering the next. Let us not only fight a good fight, but do so till we have finished our course, and imitate God in an unchangeableness of holy purposes; and to that purpose, examine ourselves daily what fixedness we have arrived unto; and to prevent any temptation to a revolt, let us often possess our minds with thoughts of the immutability of God's nature and will, which, like fire under water, will

keep a good matter boiling up in us, and make it both retain and increase its heat.

(4.) Let this doctrine teach us to have recourse to God, and aim at a near conjunction with him. When our spirits begin to flag, and a cold aguish temper is drawing upon us, let us go to him who can only fix our hearts, and furnish us with a ballast to render them steadfast. As he is only immutable in his nature, so he is the only principle of immutability, as well as being in the creature. Without his grace, we shall be as changeable in our appearances as the chameleon, and in our turnings as the wind. When Peter trusted in himself, he changed to the worse; it was his Master's recourse to God for him that preserved in him a reducing principle, which changed him again for the better, and fixed him in it (Luke 22:32). It will be our interest to be in conjunction with him, that moves not about with the heavens, nor is turned by the force of nature, nor changed by the accidents in the world; but sits in the heavens, moving all things by his powerful arm, according to his infinite skill. While we have him for our God, we have his immutability as well as any other perfection of his nature for our advantage; the nearer we come to him, the more stability we shall have in ourselves; the further from him, the more liable to change. The line that is nearest to the place where it is first fixed, is least subject to motion; the further it is stretched from it, the weaker it is, and more liable to be shaken. Let us also affect those things which are nearest to him in this perfection; the righteousness of Christ that shall never wear out, and the graces of the Spirit that shall never burn out; by this means, what God is infinitely by nature, we shall come to be finitely immutable by grace, as much as the capacity of a creature can contain.