

LECTURE XV.

GOD'S MORAL ATTRIBUTES.

SYLLABUS.

1. Define and prove from Scripture God's absolute and relative, His distributive and punitive justice.
Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 19. Dick, Lect. 25. Ridgeley, Body of Divinity, Qu. 7, p. 164. Watson's Theol. Institutes, pt. ii, ch. 7, §, (1.) Chr. Knapp, § 30, 31.
2. What is God's goodness? What the relation of it to His love, His grace and His mercy? What Scriptural proof that He possesses these attributes?
Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 20. Dick, Lect. 24. Ridgeley, Qu. 7, p. 168, &c. Charnock, Disc. xii, § 2, 3, (pp. 255 to 287.) Watson's Theol. Inst., pt. ii, ch. 6. Knapp, § 28, 2.
3. Define and prove God's truth and faithfulness, and defend from objections.
Dick, Lect. 26. Ridgeley, Qu. 7, p. 186, &c. Watson's Theol. Inst. pt. ii, ch. 7, (2.)
4. What is the holiness of God? Prove it.
Dick, Lect. 27. Charnock, Disc. xi, § 1, (pp. 135-144.) Ridgeley, Qu. 7, p. 160, &c.
5. Prove God's infinitude.
Turretin, Loc. iii, Qu. 8, 9. Thornwell, Vol. i, Lect. 4.

WE have now reached that which is the most glorious, and at the same time, the most important class of God's attributes; those which qualify Him as an infinitely perfect moral Being. These are the attributes which regulate His will, and are, therefore, so to speak, His practical perfections. Without these, His infinite presence, power, and wisdom would be rather objects of terror and fear, than of love and trust. Indeed, it is impossible to conceive how the horror of a rational being could be more thoroughly awakened, than by the idea of wicked omnipotence wielding all possible powers for the ruin or promotion of our dearest interests, yet uncontrolled alike by created force, and by moral restraints. The forlorn despair of the wretch who is left alone in the solitude of the ocean, to buffet its innumerable waves, would be a faint shadow of that which would settle over a universe in the hands of such a God. But blessed be His name, He is declared, by His works and word, to be a God of complete moral perfections. And this is the ground on which the Scriptures base their most frequent and strongest claims to the praise and love of His creatures. His power, His knowledge, His wisdom, His immutability are glorious; but the glory and loveliness of His moral attributes excellet.

God's distinct moral attributes may be counted as three—
His justice, His goodness, and His truth—
these three concurring in His consummate moral attribute, holiness.

Enumeration.

God's absolute justice is technically defined by theologians as the general rectitude of character, intrinsic in His own will. His relative justice is the acting out of that rectitude towards His creatures. His distributive justice is the quality more precisely indicated when we call Him a just God, which prompts Him to give to every one his due. His punitive justice is that phase of His distributive justice which prompts Him always to allot its due punishment to sin. No Christian theologian denies to God the quality of absolute justice, nor of a relative, as far as His general dealings with His creatures go. We have seen that even reason infers it clearly from the authority of conscience in man; from the instinctive pleasure accompanying well-doing, and pain attached to ill-doing; from the general tendency which God's providence has established, by which virtue usually promotes individual and social well-being, and vice destroys them; and from many providential retributions where crimes are made to become their own avengers. And Scripture declares His rectitude in too many places and forms, to be disputed. e. g., Ps. lxxi: 15; Ezra ix: 15; Ps. xix: 9; cxlv: 17; Rev. xvi: 7, &c., &c., Ps. lxxxix: 14; Hab. i: 13.

It is upon the punitive justice of God that the difference arises. As the establishing of this will establish *a fortiori*, the general righteousness of God's dealings, we shall continue the discussion on this point. The Socinians deny that retributive justice is an essential or an immutable attribute of God. They do not, indeed, deny that God punishes sin; nor that it would be right for Him to do so in all cases, if He willed it; but they deny that there is anything in His perfections to ensure His always willing it, as to every sin. Instead of believing that God's righteous character impels Him unchangeably to show His displeasure against sin in this way, they hold that, in those cases where He wills to punish it, He does it merely for the sinner's reformation, or the good of His government. The new school of divines also hold that while God's purpose to punish sin is uniform and unchangeable, it is only that this form of prevention against the mischiefs of sin may be diligently employed, for the good of the universe. They hold that His law is not the expression of His essence, but the invention of His wisdom. Both these opinions have this in common; that they resolve God's justice into benevolence, or utility. The principle will be more thoroughly discussed by me in the Senior Course, in connection with the satisfaction of Christ. I only remark here, that such an account of the divine attribute of justice is attended by all the absurdities which lie against the Utilitarian system of morals among men; and by others. It is opposed to God's independence, making the creature His end, instead of Himself, and the carrying out of His own perfections. It

Is God's punitive justice essential? Different theories.

violates our conscience, which teaches us that to inflict judicial suffering on one innocent, for the sake of utility, would be heinous wrong, and that there is in all sin an inherent desert of punishment for its own sake. It resolves righteousness into mere prudence, and right into advantage.

Now Calvinists hold that God is immutably determined by His own eternal and essential justice, to visit every sin with punishment according to its desert. Not indeed that He is constrained, or His free-agency is bound herein; for He is immutably impelled by nothing but His own perfection. Nor do they suppose that the unchangeableness is a blind physical necessity, operating under all circumstances, like gravitation, with a mechanical regularity. It is the perfectly regular operation of a rational perfection, co-existing with His other attributes of mercy, wisdom, &c., and therefore modifying itself according to its object; as much approving, yea, demanding, the pardon of the penitent and believing sinner, for whose sins penal satisfaction is made and applied, as, before, it demanded his punishment. In this sense, then: that God's retributive justice is not a mere expedient of benevolent utility, but a distinct essential attribute, I argue, by the following scriptural proofs:

(a.) Those Scriptures where God is declared to be a just and inflexible judge. Exod. xxxiv : 7; Ps. Proved by Scripture. v : 5; Gen. xviii : 25; Ps. xciv : 2; 1 : 6; Is. 1 : 3, 4; Ps. xcvi : 13, &c.

(b.) Those Scriptures where God is declared to hate sin. e. g., Ps. vii : 11; Ps. v : 4, 6; xlv : 7; Deut. iv : 24; Prov. xi : 20; Jer. xlv : 4; Is. lxi : 8. If the Socinian, or the New England view were correct, God could not be said to hate sin, but only the consequences of it. Now, God has no passions. Drop the human dress, in which this principle is stated; and the least we can make of this fixed hatred of God to sin, is a fixed purpose in Him to treat it as hateful.

(c.) From God's moral law, which is the transcript of His own essential perfections. Of this law, the penal sanction is always an essential part. By the Law. See Rom. x : 5; Gal. iii : 12; Rom. v : 12; Ex. xx : 7.

This fixed opposition to sin is necessary to a pure Being. Moral good and evil are the two poles, to which the magnet, rectitude, acts. The same force which makes one pole attract the magnet, makes the other pole repel it. The Northern end of the needle can only seek the North pole, as it repels the Southern. Since sin and holiness in the creature are similar opposites, that moral action by which the right conscience approves the one, is the counterpart of its opposition to the other. It is as preposterous to claim that God's approval of right is essential to His perfection, but His disapproval of wrong, is not; as to tell us of a magnet which infallibly turned

its one end to the North star, but did not certainly turn its opposite end to the Southern pole. Socinians, like all other legalists, claim that God's approval of good works is essential in Him. It should be added, that this essential opposition to sin, if it exists in God, must needs show itself in regular penal acts: because He is sovereign and almighty; and He is Supreme Ruler. If He did not treat sin as obnoxious, His regimen would tend to confound moral distinction. To all this corresponds the usual picture of God's justice in Scripture, as Rom. 2: 6-11; Prov. xvii: 15.

The ceremonial law equally proves it: for the great object of all the bloody sacrifices was to hold forth the great theological truth that there is no pardon of the sinner, without the punishment of the sin in a substitute, Heb. ix: 22.

(d.) The death of Christ, a sinless being who had no guilt of His own for which to atone. We are told that "our sins were laid upon" Christ; that "He was made sin," that "He suffered the just for the unjust," "that God might be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly;" that "the chastisement of our peace was upon Him," &c. Is. liii: 5-11; Rom. iii: 24-26; Gal. iii: 13, 14; 1st. Pet. iii: 18, &c. Now, if Christ only suffered to make a governmental display of the mischievous consequences of sin, then sin itself was not punished in Him, and all the sins of the pardoned remain forever unpunished, in express contradiction to these Scriptures. Moreover, the transaction at Calvary, instead of being a sublime exhibition of God's righteousness, was only an immoral farce. And last: not only is God not immutably just, but He is capable of being positively unjust: in that the only innocent man since Adam was made to suffer most of all men!

The particular phase of the argument from God's rectoral justice, or moral relations to the rational universe as its Ruler, will be considered more appropriately when we come to the doctrine of satisfaction; as also, Socinian objections. One of these, however, has been raised, and is so obvious, that it must be briefly noted here. It is that the righteousness of magistrates, parents, masters and teachers, is not incompatible with some relaxations of punitive justice; why then, should that of our Heavenly Father be so, who is infinitely benevolent; who is the God of love? The answer is: that God's government differs from theirs in three particulars. They are not the appointed, supreme retributors of crime (Rom. xii: 19), and their punishments, while founded on retributive justice, are not chiefly guided by this motive, but by the policy of repressing sin and promoting order. Second: they are not immutable, either in fact or profession; so that when they change their threats into pardons without satisfaction to the threatening, their natures are not necessarily dishonored. Third: they

are not omniscient, to know all the motives of the offender, and all the evidences of guilt in doubtful cases, so as to be able exactly to graduate the degree and certainty of guilt. These three differences being allowed for it, it would be as improper for man to pardon without satisfaction, as God.

God's goodness is, to creatures, one of His loveliest attributes; because it is from this that all the happiness which all enjoy flows, as water from a spring. Goodness is the *generic* attribute of which the love of benevolence, grace, pity, mercy, forgiveness, are but specific actings, distinguished by the attitude of their objects, rather than by the intrinsic principle. Goodness is God's infinite will to dispense well-being, in accordance with His other attributes of wisdom, righteousness, &c., and on all orders of His creatures according to their natures and rights. Love is God's active (but passionless) affection, by which He delights in His creatures, and in their well-being, and delights consequently in conferring it. It is usually distinguished into love of complacency, and love of benevolence. The former is a moral emotion, (though in God passionless), being His holy delight in holy qualities in His creatures, co-operating with His simple goodness to them as creatures. The latter is but His goodness manifesting itself, actively. The first loves the holy being on account of his excellence. The second loves the sinner in spite of his wickedness. When the student contrasts such texts as. Ps. vii: 11.; Rom. v: 8, he sees that this distinction must be made. Grace is the exercise of goodness where it is undeserved, as in bestowing assured eternal blessedness on the elect angels, and redemption on hell-deserving man. And because all spiritual and holy qualities in saints are bestowed by God, without desert on their part, they are called also, their graces, *χαρισματα*. Pity, or simple compassion, is goodness going forth towards a suffering object, and prompting, of course, to the removal of suffering. Mercy is pity towards one suffering for guilt. But as all the suffering of God's rational creatures is for guilt, His compassion to them is always mercy. All mercy is also grace; but all grace is not mercy.

Many theologians (of the Socinian, New England and Universalists schools) overstrain God's goodness, by representing it as His one, universally prevalent moral attribute; in such sense that His justice is but a punitive policy dictated by goodness, His truth but a politic dictate of His benevolence, &c. Their chief reliance for support of this view is on the supposed contrariety of goodness and retributive justice; and on such passages as: "God is love," &c. To the last, the answer is plain: if an exclusive sense must be forced upon such a text, as makes it mean that God has no quality but benevolence, then, when Paul and Moses say: "Our God is a consuming fire," we should

2. God's Benevolence, &c.

Are all the moral attributes only phases of Goodness?

be taught that He has no quality but justice ; and when another says : " God is light," that He is nothing but simple intelligence, without will or character. The interpretation of all must be consistent *inter se*. The supposed incompatibility of goodness and justice, we utterly deny. They are two phases, or aspects, of the same perfect character. God is not good to a certain extent, and then just, for the rest of the way, as it were by patches ; but infinitely good and just at once, in all His character and in all His dealings. He would not be truly good if He were not just. The evidence is this very connection between holiness and happiness, so intimate as to give pretext for the confusion of virtue and benevolence among moralists. God's wise goodness, so ineffably harmonized by His own wisdom and holiness, would of itself prompt Him to be divinely just ; and His justness, while it does not necessitate, approves His divine goodness.

The rational proofs of God's goodness have been already presented, drawn from the structure of man's sensitive, social and moral nature, and from the adaptations of the material world thereto.

Scriptural proofs of
God's Goodness.

(See Natural Theology. Lecture 4.) To this I might add, that the very act of constructing such a creation, where sentient beings are provided, in their several orders, with their respective natural good, bespeaks God a benevolent Being. For, being sufficient unto Himself, it must have been His desire to communicate His own blessedness, which prompted Him to create these recipients of it. Does any one object, that we say He made all for His own glory ; and, therefore, His motive was selfish, and not benevolent ? I rejoin ; What must be the attributes of that Being, who thus considers His own glory as most appropriately illustrated in bestowing enjoyment ? The fact that God makes beneficence His glory, proves Him, in the most intrinsic and noble sense, benevolent.

When we approach Scripture, we find goodness, in all its several phases, profusely asserted of God. Ps. cxlv: 8, 9 ; 1st Jno. iv : 8 ; Ex. xxxiv : 6 ; Ps. xxxiii : 5 ; lii : 1 ; ciii : 8 ; xiii : 17 ; Ps. cxxxvi ; Jas. v : 11 ; 2d. Peter, iii : 15, &c.

But the crowning proof which the Scriptures present of God's goodness, is the redemption of sinners. Rom. v : 8 ; Jno. iii : 16 ; 1st. Jno. iii : 1 ; iv :

Crowning proof from
Redemption.

10. The enhancements of this amazing display are, first : that man's misery was so entirely self-procured, and the sin which procured it so unspeakably abominable to God's infinite holiness ; second : that the misery from which He delivers is so immense and terrible, while the blessedness He confers is so complete, exalted and everlasting ; third : that ruined man was to Him so entirely unimportant and unnecessary, and moreover, so trivial and little when compared with God ; fourth : that our continued attitude towards Him throughout all this plan of mercy is one of aggravating unthank-

fulness, enmity and rebellion, up to our conversion; fifth: that God should have given such a price for such a wretched and hateful object, as the humiliation of His own Son, and the condescending work of the Holy Ghost; and last: that He should have exerted the highest wisdom known to man in any of the divine counsels, and the noblest energies of divine power, to reconcile His truth and justice with His goodness in man's redemption. Each of these features has been justly made the subject of eloquent illustration. In this argument is the inexhaustible proof for God's goodness. The work of redemption reveals a love, compassion, condescension, so strong, that nothing short of eternity will suffice to comprehend it.

The great standing difficulty concerning the divine goodness has been already briefly considered, in Lect. v, § iv.

God's truth may be said to be an attribute which characterizes all God's other moral attributes, and His intellectual. The word truth is so simple as to be, perhaps, undefinable. It may be said to be that which is agreeable to reality of things. God's knowledge is perfectly true; being exactly correspondent with the reality of the objects thereof. His wisdom is true; being unbiased by error of knowledge, prejudice, or passion. His justice is true; judging and acting always according to the real state of character and facts. His goodness is true; being perfectly sincere, and its outgoings exactly according to His own perfect knowledge of the real state of its objects, and His justice. But in a more special sense, God's truth is the attribute which characterizes all His communications to His creatures. When those communications are promissory, or minatory, it is called His faithfulness. This attribute has been manifested through two ways, to man; the testimony of our senses and intelligent faculties, and the testimony of Revelation. If our confidence in God's truth were undermined, the effect would be universally ruinous, Not only would Scripture with all its doctrines, promises, threatenings, precepts, and predictions, become worthless, but the basis of all confidence in our own faculties would be undermined; and universal skepticism would arrest all action. Man could neither believe his fellow-man, nor his own experience, nor senses, nor reason, nor conscience, nor consciousness, if he could not believe his God.

The evidences of God's truth and truthfulness are two-fold.

Evidences of it, from Reason. We find that He deals truly in the informations which He has ordained our own senses and faculties to give us, whenever they are legitimately used. The grounds upon which we believe them have been briefly reviewed in my remarks upon metaphysical skepticism. God has so formed our minds that we cannot but take for granted the legitimate informations of our senses, consciousness, and intuitions. But this unavoidable trust

is abundantly confirmed by subsequent experiences. The testimonies of one sense, for instance, are always confirmed by those of the others, when they are applied; e. g., when the eye tells us a given object is present, the touch, if applied, confirms it. The expectations raised by our intuitive reason, as e. g., that like causes will produce like effects, are always verified by the occurrence of the expected phenomena. Thus a continual process is going on, like the "proving" of a result in arithmetic. Either the seemingly true informations of our senses are really true, or the harmonious coherency of the set of errors which they assert is perfectly miraculous.

The second class of proofs is that of Scripture. Truth and faithfulness are often predicated of God in the most unqualified terms. 2 Cor. i: 18; Rev. iii: 7; vi: 10; xv: 3; xvi: 7; Deut. vii: 9; Heb. x: 23; Titus i: 2.

All the statements and doctrines of Scripture, so far as they come within the scope of man's consciousness and intuitions, are seen to be infallibly true; as, for instance, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God;" that we "go astray as soon as we be born, speaking lies," &c., &c. Again, Scripture presents us with a multitude of specific evidences of His truth and faithfulness, in the promises, threatenings, and predictions, which are contained there; for all have been fulfilled, so far as ripened.

The supposed exceptions, where threats have been left unfulfilled, as that of Jonah against Nineveh, are of very easy solution. A condition was always either implied or expressed, on which the execution of the threat was suspended.

The apparent insincerity of God's offers of mercy, and commands of obedience and penitence, held forth to those to whom He secretly intended to give no grace to comply, offers a more plausible objection. But it has been virtually exploded by what was said upon the secret and decreative, as distinguished from the revealed and preceptive will of God. I shall return to it again more particularly when I come to treat of effectual calling.

When places, Mount Zion, utensils, oils, meats, altars, days, &c., are called holy, the obvious meaning is, that they are consecrated—
 4. God's Holiness. i. e., set apart to the religious service of God. This idea is also prominent, when God's priests, prophets, and professed people, are called holy. But when applied to God, the word is most evidently not used in a ceremonial, but a spiritual sense. Most frequently it seems to express the general idea of His moral purity, as Levit. xi: 44; Ps. cxlv: 17; 1 Pet. i: 15, 16; sometimes it seems to express rather the idea of His majesty, not exclusive of His moral perfections, but inclusive also of His power, knowledge and wisdom, as in Ps. xxii: 3; cxviii: 1; Is. vi: 3; Rev. iv: 8. Holiness, therefore, is to be

regarded, not as a distinct attribute, but as the resultant of all God's moral attributes together. And as His justice, goodness, and truth are all predicated of Him as a Being of intellect and will, and would be wholly irrelevant to anything unintelligent and involuntary, so His holiness implies a reference to the same attributes. His moral attributes are the special crown; His intelligence and will are the brow that wears it. His holiness is the collective and consummate glory of His nature as an infinite, morally pure, active, and intelligent Spirit.

We have now gone around the august circle of the Divine attributes, so far as they are known to us. In another sense I may say that the summation of them leads us to God's other consummate attribute—His infinitude. This is an idea which can only be defined negatively. We mean by it that God's being and attributes are wholly without bounds. Some divines, indeed, of modern schools, would deny that we mean anything by the term, asserting that infinitude is an idea which the human mind cannot have at all. They employ Sir W. Hamilton's well known argument that "the finite mind cannot think the unconditioned; because to think it is to limit it." It has always seemed to me that the plain truth on this subject is, that man's mind does apprehend the idea of infinitude, (else whence the word?) but that it cannot comprehend it.* It knows that there is the infinite; it cannot fully know what it is. God's nature is absolutely without bound, as to His substance, (immense,) as to His duration, (eternal,) as to His knowledge, (omniscience,) as to His will, (omnipotence,) as to His moral perfections, (holiness.) It is an infinite essence.

One of the consequences which flows from these perfections of God in His absolute sovereignty, which in so often asserted of Him in Scripture; e. g., Dan. iv: 35; Rev. xix: 16; Rom. ix: 15-23; 1 Tim. vi: 15; Rev. iv: 11. By this we do not mean a power to do everything, as e. g., to punish an innocent creature, contradictory to God's own perfections; but a righteous title to do everything, and control every creature, unconstrained by anything outside His own will, but always in harmony with His own voluntary perfections. When we call it a righteous title, we mean that it is not only a *δύναμις*, but an *ἐξουσία*, not only a physical *potentia*, but a moral *potestas*. The foundations of this righteous authority are, first, God's infinite perfections; second, His creation of all His creatures out of nothing; and third, His preservation and blessing of them. This sovereignty, of course, carries with it the correlative duty of implicit obedience on our part.

But second: Another consequence which flows from the infinite perfections of God is that He is entitled not only to dis-

* See, on this point, my work on the Sensualistic Philosophy of the 19th Century; Chap. X Schuyler's Logic—Last Part.

pose of us and our services, for His own glory, but to receive our supreme, sincere affections. Just in degree as the hearts of His intelligent creatures are right, will they admire, revere, and love God, above all creatures, singly or collectively.
