

ARTICLE VII.

GOD THE SUPREME DISPOSER AND MORAL GOVERNOR.

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In the scriptures, God is represented as being himself, in some sense, the end of all his works: "Thou hast made all things for thyself" (Prov. xvi. 4); "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. iv. 11); "For whom are all things, and by whom are all things" (Heb. ii. 10).

By the most respectable theologians these scriptures are understood to mean that the glory of God is the great object and end of all his works; that in all that he has done, or ever will do, his prime object is, to exhibit himself, to display his perfections, to show forth his glory, so that his intelligent creatures may have the means of knowing, loving, and enjoying him in the highest degree of which they are capable. And this involves, necessarily, their highest good. In this view, the brightest display of God's glory, and the highest good of the intelligent universe are identical, and together constitute the ultimate and most worthy end of the Supreme Being in all his works.

In displaying his glory to the view of creatures, God necessarily exhibits himself in different attitudes and lights. He represents himself as discharging different offices and works. Viewed in one aspect, we behold his power; in another, his wisdom; in another, his goodness and his truth. In fulfilling one office, he displays his glorious sovereignty; in another, his glorious justice and his grace. In these ways God makes a more full exhibition of himself than would otherwise be possible. He glorifies himself in the highest degree.

Among the different offices which God fulfils, and in the fulfilling of which he shows forth his glory, are those of

Supreme Disposer and Moral Governor. There is a manifest distinction between these offices; and in what follows we shall endeavour to illustrate and apply it, and show its importance in a system of theology.

In different parts of the Bible God speaks, and is spoken of, in each of these different offices and works; and, first, as *the Sovereign and Supreme Disposer*: "I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I, the Lord, do all these things" (Is. xlv. 6, 7). And again, in a parallel passage: "I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done; saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. xlvi. 9, 10). "He is of one mind, and none can turn him; and whatsoever his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job xxiii. 13). "He doeth 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 doest thou" (Dan. iv. 35)? "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another to dishonor?" "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. ix. 15, 21). "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will" (Eph. i. 11).

In these and the like passages God speaks, and is spoken of, in the high character of supreme and sovereign disposer. It was in this office of supreme disposer that he in eternity formed the plan of all his future operations. It was a boundless plan, extending through all space and time, to all contingences and events. It was an infinitely perfect plan, requiring no change, admitting no improvement or alteration. At the appointed season, and in fulfilment of his eternal purpose, God brought the worlds into existence; some higher, and some lower; some material, and some spiritual; some nearer the great source and centre of being, and some at remoter distances from it. He upholds in existence the

worlds he has made; he moves them in regular order, according to established laws; he has filled them with living creatures of different orders and species, from the highest angel to the meanest worm; he preserves and disposes of all things according to his pleasure. Not a planet rolls or an angel flies but by his power; not a hair is plucked or a sparrow falls without his notice. Not a human being is born or dies, is prospered or afflicted, is saved or destroyed, but his hand is, in some way, concerned in it all.

The affairs of nations, too, as well as of individuals, are all subject to his providential control. He builds up or plucks down, as seemeth good in his sight. He often dashes guilty nations one against another, and makes them the instruments of their own destruction. Even those events which are brought about by human agency are not exempt from his providential control. "Man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is from the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 9, 33).

Thus, God is not only the original contriver and creator, but the supreme disposer of all things; and the devout mind loves to regard him in this light. He loves to see God exalted above all contingences, beyond the reach of all his foes. He delights to behold him rolling along the great wheel of his providence in its appointed course, bringing light out of darkness, and good out of evil, and overruling all things, however they may seem to us at present, for his own highest glory and the greatest good. It is under impressions such as these that the believing heart exclaims: "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, and thy glory above all the earth." "Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."

Such is God, the supreme disposer. Let us now turn and contemplate him in that other aspect of which we spoke, as *moral governor*. The moral government of God is that government of law which he exercises over intelligent and moral beings. In kind it resembles human governments,

and like them is administered by laws and motives, rewards and punishments. It differs essentially from that sovereign disposal of things of which we have spoken. That is altogether in the hands of God, and men have naught to do with it, except to submit and rejoice in it. But in the moral government of God men have a deep and active concern. They are themselves the responsible subjects of this government. Its motives are addressed to them; its laws bind them. If obedient, they are entitled to its promised rewards; if disobedient, to its just penalties. As supreme disposer, God orders all the circumstances and events of our lives, according to his pleasure; while as moral governor he makes known to us his will, and presses upon us, with the authority of a sovereign and the affection of a father, our obligation to obey.

Theologians generally have marked the distinction between the eternal purposes of God and his law. The law of God is clearly revealed; but his purposes, except in a few leading particulars, he has not revealed. They are among the secret things which belong only to himself. The law of God is a rule of conduct for us; but his purposes, even when we know them, are not to us a rule of conduct. The law of God is often broken — broken in every case of sin; but his purposes are never broken, not even by the greatest wickedness. The murderers of our Saviour most terribly violated the law of God; but they fulfilled his purpose. “ Him being delivered by *the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, ye with wicked hands have crucified and slain ” (Acts ii. 23).

These points of distinction between the law and the purposes of God, which are so very obvious, and so generally understood, show the fact of the distinction which we are endeavoring to illustrate. The eternal purposes of God belong to him as supreme disposer. They constitute the boundless and perfect plan, according to which all the movements of his providence are conducted: “ He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” But the law of

God pertains to his office and work as moral governor. It is the rule of conduct which he has prescribed to his creatures, and which he is bound, as moral governor, to enforce. Heaven and earth might better pass away than that one jot or tittle of the law should fail.

These different parts of the divine administration, in some cases, run together; while in others, they present an aspect of diversity, if not of contrariety. Thus the free actions of men, which fall under the moral government of God, are also subject, somehow, to his providential control. While "man's heart deviseth his way, the Lord directeth his steps." "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, are from the Lord." Then the dispensations of God's providence are often employed as motives in carrying into effect his moral government.

In every act of obedience, the law and the purpose of God are both fulfilled, and the two parts of his administration run quite together. But how is it in cases of disobedience? There the law of God is broken; but is his purpose also broken? Is that defeated? Never. "My council shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." "Him, being delivered by the determinate council and foreknowledge of God, ye with wicked hands have crucified and slain."

It adds immensely to the interest of God's work of moral government, to consider it in its connection with the atonement of Christ. It was the exigencies of moral government, in *the salvation of sinners*, which made an atonement necessary. It is in connection with moral government, in its bearing upon the great question of human salvation, that an atonement has been made. We have all rebelled against the government of God, have broken his holy law, and exposed ourselves to suffer its righteous penalty. God's justice binds him to inflict this penalty. If his moral government is to be sustained it must be inflicted, unless some expedient of mercy can be devised, which shall satisfy the justice of God and answer all the ends of law and gov-

ernment as well. If such an expedient can be provided, then a righteous moral governor may, if he pleases, and on such terms as he pleases, remit the penalty to the transgressor; because, by the supposition, remission, pardon, justification, under such circumstances, weakens not at all the authority of God's government, and does no dishonor to the law. But if no such expedient can be provided, then, as sure as the Lord reigns, and will reign in justice and glory forever, no sinner of the human race can be saved.

Now this expedient of mercy, so indispensable to our salvation, is no other than the atonement of Christ. When we were exposed to die, Christ died for us. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. By his voluntary sufferings and death he magnified the law we had broken, and made it honorable; he vindicated the authority and satisfied the justice of the Supreme Ruler; he laid the sole and sufficient foundation, on which fallen, guilty, ruined sinners, who return to him in penitence and faith, can be pardoned and saved.

Standing on the ground of this atonement, and speaking in the capacity of moral governor, we hear the great God making terms to his revolted creatures, sending forth his invitations of mercy, and beseeching them to become reconciled to himself: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth"; "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters"; "Whosoever will, let him come, and take the waters of life freely." In the same capacity we hear him pouring forth the desires of his heart for the salvation of the lost, in language such as this: "Oh that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me, and keep my commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" In the same capacity, too, we hear him lamenting the miserable doom of those who had sinned away their day of grace, and shrinking, as it were, from the inflictions which he found himself constrained to visit upon them. "How shall

I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel? My heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together." "Oh that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes."

Language such as this is altogether befitting the Supreme Being in his capacity of moral governor, administering a government of law over apostate creatures for whom a provision of mercy had been made, and upon whom it was tenderly and persuasively urged. But it would not at all befit him in that other capacity of sovereign and supreme disposer, who "doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of earth"; who "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

In the capacity of moral governor, God commands, invites, and intreats his apostate creatures; he promises, threatens, and expostulates. In some instances he seems at a loss to know what to do with them: "Then said the Lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son." He expresses the intensest sorrow at their ingratitude and wickedness, and yearns over them, as we have seen, with all the affection of a father. He finally passes judgment upon them, and rewards or punishes them according to their deeds. In short, the Bible, from one end to the other, is little more than a record of God's various dealings with men, as a moral governor. Occasionally, he speaks out, in that other capacity to which we have referred. We hear also of his sovereign, providential dispensations. But probably nine tenths of the contents of the book of God has respect to that other part of the divine administration, his moral government.

It is sometimes said that those strong expressions of desire on the part of God, as a moral governor, for the salvation of the wicked, and of regret and sorrow at their wilful blindness and ruin, are not to be understood literally. It is God speaking after the manner of men, and representing

himself as in possession of human passions and feelings. But we see no objection to understanding these expressions, for the most part, literally. God has an emotional nature, as well as an intellectual and voluntary nature. He not only perceives and wills, but he feels. He feels intensely, as such a being must, if he feels at all. He feels pleasure and displeasure, love and hatred, joy and sorrow, desire, concern, interest, and regret, just as he exhibits himself in the Bible. We certainly are subject to all these affections, and should have been, had we never sinned; and we are expressly said to have been made in the image of God.

It is further said, that by the distinction we have set up, we virtually make two Gods; two distinct and independent beings. But this is not true. It is the one God of whom we speak, presenting himself before us in different attitudes and lights; discharging different offices and works; and thus displaying himself more adequately and truly, and showing more of his glory, than would otherwise be possible. The three persons in the Trinity perform distinct offices in the great work of our redemption; but this does not prove them three distinct and independent beings. The Lord our God is one God and one only.

The distinction which has been made between the sovereign disposals of God and his moral government is believed to be one of great importance. It is so theologically and practically.

In the first place, it helps us to understand and to harmonize some apparently discrepant representations of scripture. To some extent, these scriptures have been quoted already. In one class of scriptures it is said that God "doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth"; that he "is of one mind, and none can turn him, and that whatsoever his soul desireth, even that he doeth"; that he "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy"; that his "counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure." But in other scriptures it appears that God's pleasure is not always done; that his will is crossed: and

that he intensely desires many things which are not accomplished: "Oh that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever." "Oh that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace!" "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?"

In order to remove this difficulty, some have presumed to say that God cannot convert and save all men. He earnestly desires the salvation of all, but he cannot effect it. He converts and saves as many as he can. But this, obviously, is not harmonizing the two classes of scriptures at all. It is rather annulling the one class in order to save the other. God desires the salvation of his guilty creatures, undoubtedly; for he hath said it. But how is this truth consistent with those other declarations, that he "doeth according to his will;" that he "hath mercy on whom he will have mercy;" and that, "with him, all things are possible?" Here is the real difficulty of the case; and the solution above suggested goes not a step towards removing it.

Some have thought to remove the difficulty by insisting that all men will finally be saved. God desires the salvation of all, and will ultimately save all; for "whatsoever his soul desireth, even that it doeth." But it is certain from many scriptures, and even from some of the class referred to, that all men are not to be saved: "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" "Oh that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes."

Others have attempted to remove the difficulty by saying that while God desires, in itself considered, the salvation of all men, he does not purpose, on the whole, to put forth his power and save all. A distinction is made between what God desires, in itself considered, and what he purposes, on the whole. And this, I have no doubt, is a valid distinction. It is one which is continually made and acted upon in common life. It is one which may properly be applied to the case in hand. And yet it does not seem to

us to tell the whole truth on the subject. It does not reach to the full extent of it, or embrace all that requires to be said.

In order to make the matter plain, we need that other distinction which has been insisted upon in this discussion. As supreme and sovereign disposer God puts forth certain claims, and utters a peculiar language. It is all true. It is glorious truth, on which every friend of God delights to ponder and to rest. God could not show forth his glory to his creatures, and withhold those sublime exhibitions of himself, which, as sovereign disposer, he has been pleased to make. At the same time, in administering a moral government over free, intelligent creatures, and especially over apostate creatures, whom, on the ground of the atonement, he is endeavoring to win back to the truth and save, it is proper that he should use quite another language. It is proper that he should invite, exhort, reprove, entreat, and warn; it is proper that he should express his desires, and pour forth his paternal yearnings, and urge every appropriate motive to bring the sinner to repentance. And if he will not return to his duty, it is proper that the injured Sovereign should give vent to his feelings in the language of our blessed Lord: "Oh that thou hadst known, in this thy day, the things which belonged to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thine eyes." Language such as this, with which the scriptures abound, is all true and important, and most honorable to the heart of its divine author, and indispensable to a full exhibition of his character and glory. Nor is it at all inconsistent with that other language which, standing in a different relation, and speaking and acting in a different capacity, God uses to set forth his supreme control over all creatures and all worlds.

The distinction on which we have insisted is important, as it goes to vindicate the sincerity of God in his invitations and entreaties, and in all the efforts which, as a compassionate moral governor, he is pleased to make, to bring sinners to the knowledge of the truth. It is often said that if

God's claims of sovereignty are just, he cannot be sincere in his invitations. Having all hearts in his hands, and being perfectly able to turn them as he pleases, if he really desires the conversion of sinners, why does he not turn them to himself? Why does he not put forth his power, and subdue their wills, and end the struggle at a stroke? And is not the fact that this is not done conclusive proof, either that he lacks the power, or that in the expression of his desires, he is insincere? Or to place the difficulty in another light: how can God sincerely invite and entreat those to come to him and live whom he certainly knows never will come, and respecting whom he has even a plan, a purpose, that they never shall?

We have chosen to present this objection in all its force. It has been a perplexing one to ministers and Christians; a difficulty with which they have been unwilling to grapple; preferring rather to leave it among the dark things of God. And we frankly acknowledge that, except on the ground of the distinction above illustrated, we should be at a loss how to dispose of it.

The objection to God's sincerity, it will be seen, is two-fold. The first form of it is grounded on his absolute control over the hearts and actions of men. If he has such a control, and sincerely desires the salvation of sinners, why does he not exercise it, and turn all men to himself? The other form of the objection is grounded on the universal purposes and foreknowledge of God. If it has entered into his great plan of providence and grace that certain individuals are not to be saved, how can he sincerely urge them to accept of life?

It will be seen that both these objections owe all their plausibility to a confounding of the distinction between God as the supreme disposer and a moral governor. It is God in the same office, and acting in the same capacity, who has formed his decrees of election and reprobation, and exercises a sovereign control over the hearts and actions of men, while at the same time he is inviting and entreat-

ing all men to come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. And this, it is said, and said justly, seems crooked and insincere.

But we have seen that it is not God in the same office, and acting in the same capacity, who gives utterance to these seemingly discrepant forms of speech. It is God, the supreme and sovereign disposer, who has formed his universal plan, and is giving it effect throughout his immense dominions of providence and grace. It is in this capacity that none can stay his resistless hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? But it is in a very different capacity; that of a father, a ruler, a compassionate moral governor, that he gives utterance to his invitations, his entreaties, his paternal yearnings, for the salvation of those who persistently turn their backs upon the overtures of his love. He is perfectly sincere in these utterances. He is intensely earnest in them. He feels all that he expresses, and infinitely more than can be expressed in the language of mortals.

Without the distinction which has been indicated there is no such thing as vindicating the sincerity of the divine Being in the invitations of his love. But with this distinction clearly formed, rightly understood, and carried with us in our interpretations of the Bible, there is no difficulty. In both the capacities in which God presents himself before us, his utterances are all true; they are precious truths; and infinitely honorable to himself.

Nor let any one think to refute our reasonings on this subject, by comparisons drawn from mere earthly relations, as of a father to his children, or a ruler to his subjects. The truth is, no earthly relations can reach to the vastness of the subject in hand, or can be employed, except in a very little way, to illustrate it. The parent may exercise a kind of moral government over his children. He may give them laws, and desire and exact obedience. He may also, during their minority, have the disposal generally of their affairs. But is he their Creator and their Supreme Disposer? Does

he exercise such a sovereignty or such a moral government over them as God does? Or is he under a necessity of speaking and acting in different relations and capacities, as God is, in order to unfold more adequately his character and display his glory? We make these remarks for the purpose of showing how dangerous it is to attempt illustrating divine things by human things; or to attempt refuting the plain declarations of God's word by comparisons drawn from mere human relations.

The distinction of which we have spoken is further important, because, if correctly understood and applied, it would heal many differences and disputes among evangelical Christians. The most of these differences cluster around the great subjects of God's sovereignty and our responsibility; his purposes and our duties; his uncontrollable agency in disposing the affairs and actions of men, and our freedom to do as we please, and form characters good or evil. Some good men are so enamoured of the doctrines of God's decree and his sovereignty as to think of little else. They forget a class of truths which lie over on the other side: such as man's freedom and accountability, his subjection to law, and his obligations to labor for the salvation of his own soul and the souls of others. "God will fulfil his own purposes, he will gather in his own elect, he will overrule all things for his highest glory and the greatest good; and why should we trouble ourselves about duties and responsibilities? Commit everything to God, rest implicitly in his decrees, and wait the disposals of his blessed will." Thus some men reason and act on the subject of religion, who, if they should do the same in regard to the common affairs of life, would be justly thought to require a guardian.

But at the farthest remove from these, and often in sharp controversy with them, is a class of religionists who think little of God's sovereignty and decrees, and believe still less. They know that we are free, responsible agents; that God has given us his law, and that we are bound to obey it. They know also that God has revealed to us the gospel,

which we are bound to accept; that if we do accept it in faith and love, we shall be saved; but if we turn from it, and refuse obedience, we shall be lost. They know as much as this, and this they say is enough. Under the influence of truths and motives such as these, they are working out their own salvation; and they look with distrust, perhaps contempt, upon those who, passing over these weightier matters, are prying into the deep things of God.

It is true of both these classes of persons that they regard God as speaking and acting, in his word, in only one capacity or character; they endeavour to square all that he says to that; and what cannot be made to square with it they either ignore or throw away. And as they fail to ignore the same classes of passages, the result is that they widely differ in their understanding of the scriptures, and fall into altercations and disputes. Now, the only remedy for this state of things is for them to set up the distinction on which we have insisted, and carry it with them through the Bible. We do not believe in two Gods, but in *one*, who, the better to display his character and perfections, speaks and acts in two different capacities. He certainly is the creator and supreme disposer of all things. He formed his plan in eternity; his purpose shall stand; and he "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." It will not do for us to ignore representations such as these, or to pass them slightly over, or to attempt to explain them away. If we do so, we shall lose the noblest views of God — those which fill all heaven with rapturous adoration, and which he has revealed for our comfort while here below.

On the other hand, it is certain that God is a moral governor over free, intelligent, active beings, who are bound to serve and obey him, and who, having revolted from him, are bound to return to him in penitence and love, as a compassionate moral governor. God invites us, in all sincerity and earnestness, to return and accept the overtures of his grace. Let us believe God in all that he says of himself,

and in all that he says to us. Let us take in, so far as we may, that full view of his character and glory which he has set before us. So shall we be, neither Antinomians nor Arminians, nor one-sided heretics of any description; but may hope to grow up "into the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

We have said that the distinction on which we have insisted is one of great importance *practically*. We must regard our God in the capacity of sovereign and supreme disposer, in order that we may gain the most exalted conceptions of him, and under all circumstances may repose and rejoice in him. There are times when we want to see God as an uncontrollable sovereign, seated on the circuit of the heavens, and rolling into effect his undisturbed decrees; bringing light out of darkness and good out of evil, and causing the wrath of man to contribute to his praise. There are times when, if we could not take these high and ennobling views of God, we should have no ground of hope or comfort left.

At the same time, we love to regard the Almighty as a righteous moral governor, as a most beneficent ruler, as our heavenly Father, who has given us the best of laws, and whose government over us is perfectly wise and good. More especially do we love to regard him in the dispensations of his grace, opening a way for the recovery of the lost, and calling to his wandering children to return unto him and live. Without these views of God, we might adore and fear him, but we could not love him as we ought. We could not be melted, as we now should be, in the ever warming, enlivening beams of his tenderness and love.

If we mistake not, the Christian world affords examples of the danger of taking in but partial conceptions of God, of entertaining a one-sided view of his character. To say nothing of those who so represent the sovereignty of God as to cut off entirely the free-agency of man; or of those, on the other hand, who so exalt the human will, as to leave God no certain control over the hearts and actions of crea-

tures; there are undoubtedly pious persons, sincere Christians, whose characters suffer on account of the partial, imperfect views which they are led to take of the Supreme Being. Here, we will suppose, is a class of Christians, to which we have before referred, whose minds dwell chiefly on the sovereignty of God. They think much of his sovereign purpose and providence. They rejoice that "the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, and the thought of his heart to all generations"; that he "is of one mind, and none can turn him, and whatsoever his soul desireth, even that he doeth." The effect of dwelling almost exclusively upon topics such as these, is to form a particular type of Christian character — trustful, stable, firm, and for the most part joyful; but still hard, rigid, wanting in gentleness, tenderness, sometimes in conscientiousness, and in a wakeful, active concern for the good of souls. Persons of this character will sometimes put over to the sovereignty of God what they ought to be using means to accomplish themselves.

At the other extreme we find a class of Christians who, owing to wrong instruction, prejudice, or some other cause, think little of what is called the sovereignty of God. They do not understand it, are afraid of it, and, as it presents itself to their minds, feel no complacency in it. They prefer to dwell on another class of subjects, such as the goodness of God, more especially as manifested in the work of redemption; on the love of Christ in consenting to come into the world and die for sinners; on the freeness and universality of the gospel offers; on the invitations and motives of the gospel, and on the obligations of men, everywhere, to yield to these motives and secure everlasting life. Now, the dwelling perpetually on considerations such as these — true and important as they may be in themselves — tends to form a particular type of Christian character, and a very different type from that last exhibited. These Christians will be earnest and active, certainly, at times. Their love, zeal, and engagedness will rise very high. And yet, perhaps, they will be fitful, unstable, driven about by gusts of feeling

or the force of circumstances, like a ship without anchor, ballast, or helm. They need those high views of the sovereignty of God, to which they have never yet attained, to steady them, to sustain them, to give them comfort in seasons of darkness as well as of light; to lead them to adore and fear God as well as love him; to confide in him as well as actively serve him; in short, to give proportion and symmetry to their Christian character, and form them in a meetness for heaven.

The two classes of persons to whom we have referred are supposed, both of them, to be truly pious; and the characters of both are formed (as every person's must be) according to the views which they respectively entertain. And the characters of both are one-sided, out of proportion, because they have been led to entertain partial, one-sided views of God. We must habitually think of God, not only as the supreme disposer, but as a righteous moral governor; not only in the steady march of his glorious sovereignty, but in his tender love and pity for dying men. We must think of him in his whole character, as he has revealed himself to us in his works and in his word; and then, if we are Christians indeed, our hearts will be formed into his whole image and likeness.

As the two aspects in which we have been led to view the divine character are very distinct, so the duties resulting from them are distinct also. We are to adore and fear, in view of the divine sovereignty. We are to submit to it, and rejoice in it. We are to stay ourselves upon it at all times, so we shall not be greatly moved.

But as active beings, free moral agents, bound to avoid the evil and choose the good, and to do good to the utmost of our ability, we have to do with God, chiefly, as a moral governor. His holy law binds us. This is to be, at all times, our standard of character and rule of life. We have indeed broken it, and incurred its fearful penalty, but as a kind, paternal, moral governor, God is not willing to give us up. He has opened a way of recovery for us, and in all

the benignity of his infinite heart, is crying after us to be wise: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Our first and immediate duty to our great moral governor, is to listen to those accents of mercy, and comply. Tenderly invited, we must come with the whole heart, and receive the waters of life freely.

And having received this living water ourselves, we must do all in our power to impart it to others. The views which the scriptures give us of the sovereignty of God, will be no hinderance to us in this mighty work. Who was ever a more firm believer in the sovereignty of God than the apostle Paul? And yet who ever burned with a more ardent desire, or labored with a more untiring fidelity, for the salvation of souls? Happy the gospel minister, happy the private Christian, who takes the same view of the divine character with the apostle Paul, and forms his own character after the same model.

ARTICLE VIII.

THE BRETHREN OF CHRIST.

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ON the question of the brethren or brothers¹ of our Saviour, three different opinions have been entertained and are still current among commentators: 1) They were only cousins of Jesus, sons of either a sister of Mary or a brother of Joseph; 2) They were younger children of Joseph and Mary, or uterine brothers of Jesus; 3) They were children of Joseph by a former marriage, and hence step-brothers of

¹ In our English Version of the Bible the word "brothers" never occurs, but always "brethren" instead. But in modern English the former is used for natural, the latter for moral or spiritual relationship. See the Dictionaries.