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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 10

OF THE WISDOM OF GOD

The next attribute of God, which requires our attention, is, the Wisdom of God, which belongs to him as an intelligent Spirit; and is a more comprehensive attribute than that of knowledge; for it not only supposes that, but directs and uses it, in the best manner, and to the best ends and purposes; as well as his power and goodness. I shall,

1. Prove that wisdom is a perfection in God, and is in him in its utmost perfection; it is consummate and infinite wisdom he is possessed of. No one that believes the being of a God, can admit the least doubt of it. An unwise Being cannot be God. No man is wise, says Pythagoras, but God only. That "with him is wisdom", is frequently asserted in the sacred scriptures, (Job 12:12, 13; Dan. 2:20, 21). And, indeed, if this is, and is expected to be with ancient men, who have lived long, and have had a large experience of things; then much more, infinitely more, may it be thought to be with him, who is "the ancient of days", and from everlasting to everlasting God. He is no less than three times said to be "the only wise God" (Rom. 16:27; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 1:25). Not to the exclusion of his Son, who is called "wisdoms", plurally, because of the infinite fulness of wisdom that dwells in him, (Prov. 1:20) nor of the Spirit, who is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him, (Eph. 1:17) but with respect to creatures, who have no wisdom, in comparison of him; the angels, those knowing and wise beings, when compared with him, are chargeable with "folly", (Job 4:18) and as for "man, though he would be wise, he is born like a wild ass's colt"; and has very little wisdom in things civil, none in things spiritual; and though he is wise to do evil, to do good he has no knowledge. God is "all-wise"; he has all wisdom in him; there is no defect of it in him; there is nothing of it wanting in him, with respect to anything whatever. Men may be wise in some things, and not in others; but he is wise in everything; "nemo sapit omnibus horis"; no man is wise at

all times; the wisest of men sometimes say a foolish word, and do a foolish thing: but God, neither in his word, nor in any of his works, can be charged with folly; not an unwise saying appears in all the scriptures; nor an unwise action in any of his works; "How manifold are thy works, O Lord, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" (Ps. 104:24). God is essentially wise; there is the personal wisdom of God, which is Christ; who is often spoken of as wisdom, and as the wisdom of God; (see Prov. 8:12-31; 1 Cor. 1:24) and there is his essential wisdom, the attribute now under consideration; which is no other than the nature and essence of God; it is himself; as he is love itself, and goodness itself, so he is wisdom itself; his wisdom cannot be separated from his essence; this would be contrary to his simplicity, and he would not be that simple and uncompounded Spirit he has been proved to be. God is wisdom "efficiently"; he is the source and fountain of it, the God and giver of it; all that is in the angels of heaven comes from him; all that Adam had, or any of his sons; or was in Solomon, the wisest of men; or is in the politicians and philosophers of every age; or in every mechanic; or appears in every art and science; all is the gift of God; and particularly, the highest and best of wisdom, spiritual wisdom, wisdom in the hidden part, the fear of God in the soul of man, is what God puts there; wherefore, as he that teacheth man knowledge, must have knowledge himself; so he that gives wisdom to the wise, must have infinite wisdom himself; for such is the wisdom of God, it is unsearchable; there is no tracing it; it has a βάθος, "a depth", which is unfathomable, (Rom. 11:33; Job 11:6-9, 28:12-23) yet; though it cannot be traced out to the full, or be found out to perfection, there are some shining appearances and striking instances of it; which clearly and plainly prove that wisdom, in its utmost extent, is with him. And which,

2. Will be next observed. And,

. First, The wisdom of God appears in his purposes and decrees, and which are therefore called his counsels, (Isa. 25:1) not that they are the effects of consultation with himself or others; but because such resolutions and determinations with men are generally the wisest, which are formed on close thought, on mature deliberation, and on consultation with themselves and others. Hence the decrees of God, which are at once fixed with the highest wisdom, are called counsels; though his counsels are without consultation, and his determinations without deliberation; of which he has no need. As he sees in his understanding, what is fittest to be done, his wisdom directs his will to determine, at once, what shall be done; and this is seen in appointing the end for which they are to be, in ordaining means suitable and conducive to that end; and in pitching upon the most proper time for execution; and in guarding against every thing that may hinder that. The end for which God has appointed all that has been, or shall be, is himself, his own glory, the best end that can be proposed; "the Lord hath made", that is, appointed "all things for himself"; for the glorifying of himself, one or other of the perfections of his nature; for as all things are of him, as the efficient cause; and are through him, as the wise orderer and disposer of them; so they are to him, as the final cause, or last end of them, his own glory (Prov. 16:4; Rom. 11:36). The means he fixes on to bring it about, are either extraordinary or ordinary; which latter are second causes dependmg upon

him, the first Cause, and which are linked together, and under his direction and influence most certainly attain the end; see (Hosea 2:21, 22) and which is effected in the most seasonable time; for as there is a purpose for everything done under the heavens, there is a time fixed for every purpose; and as the times and seasons are in the power of God, and at his disposal, he pitches upon that which is the most suitable; for he makes everything beautiful in his time, (Eccl. 3:1, 11; Acts 1:7) and being the omniscient God, he foresees all future events, the end from the beginning; so that nothing unforeseen by him can occur to hinder the execution of his purposes; wherefore his "counsel shall stand", and he "will do all his pleasure", (Isa. 46:10) and though there may be many devices formed to counterwork his designs, they are all in vain; there is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord; he disappoints the devices of the crafty, and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong; so that his counsel always stands; and the thoughts of his heart, which are his decrees, are to all generations. All this is true of the decrees of God in general. And if the princes of this world, under a divine direction, form wise counsels, and make wise and righteous decrees; with what greater, with what consummate wisdom, must the counsels and decrees of God himself be made; concerning which the apostle breaks forth into this exclamation, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God?" (Rom. 11:33) for he is there treating of the decrees of God, and particularly of the decree of election: and in which the wisdom of God appears, both in the end and means, and in the persons he has chosen: his end is the praise of his own grace, or the glorifying of his sovereign grace and mercy in the salvation of men, (Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:5, 6) to show the sovereignty of it, he passed this decree without any respect to the works of men, and before either good or evil were done; and to show that he is no respecter of persons, he chose some out of every nation, Jews and Gentiles; and to show the freeness of his grace, he chose the foolish and weak things of this world, and things that are not; that no flesh should glory in his presence: and as he chose those persons to be holy, and to bring them to a state of holiness and happiness, and in a way consistent with his justice; he has pitched upon means the wisest that could be devised, even "sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth; the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus", the righteousness and death of Christ (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). So that this decree stands firm and stable; not on the ground of mens' works, but upon the will of God; the election always obtains, or its end is answered: those that are ordained to eternal life most surely believe; and they that are predestinated to it, are most certainly "called, justified and glorified" (Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:30). The subordinate end of election, is the salvation of the elect; that is what they are appointed to, (1 Thess. 5:9) the scheme and plan of which salvation is so wisely formed, that it is called the "manifold wisdom of God", in which there are various displays of it, (Eph. 3:10) and particularly, "the counsel of peace", which was between the Father and the Son, (Zech. 6:13) for "God was in Christ reconciling the world of his elect unto himself", planning the scheme of their peace and reconciliation; not imputing their trespasses unto them; for then no reconciliation could have been made; but to Christ, by whom atonement is made, and so salvation effected. But of the wisdom of God, in this decree of salvation, with respect to the Author, subjects, time, and manner, more hereafter, under another head. Moreover, the decree of God, respecting the leaving,

passing by, and rejection of others, and punishing them for their sins, his end in which being for the glorifying of his justice in their condemnation, is without any imputation either of unrighteousness or folly; for "what if God, willing to show his wrath", his indignation against sin, and "to make his power known", in taking vengeance on sinners, "endured with much longsuffering", their sinful course of life with much patience; even "the vessels of wrath", justly deserving of it, "fitted for destruction" by their own sins, he appointed them to it (Rom. 9:22). What charge of injustice or folly can be brought against him? Yea, even such decrees of God as are about the sinful actions of men, are not destitute of wisdom, of the highest wisdom. The sin and fall of Adam, so momentous, and of such consequence as to affect all mankind, could never have been without the knowledge and will of God; he could have prevented it if he would; but he left, as he decreed to leave, man to the mutability of his will; the consequence of which was his fall: and, as he designed, so in his infinite wisdom, he has overruled this greatest of all evils; the source of all that has been in the world since, for the greatest good, the salvation of men by Christ; whereby all his perfections are glorified: so the sinful actions of men are, by the permissive will of God, suffered to be, and are sometimes apparently overruled for some important end; as the selling of Joseph into Egypt by his brethren: and especially the crucifixion of Christ by the wicked Jews; both decreed by God. And so wicked men are suffered to commit the grossest sins, as Pharaoh, that God may be glorified in his justice, through inflicting his judgments on them; by the execution of which he is known, and his name celebrated with praise and glory (Ex. 9:16). And likewise the failings and sins of God's people serve for the humbling of them, and the exercise of their graces; and so are overruled for good. But then by this we are not authorised, nor encouraged to do evil, that good may come; God only can overrule it to serve any good purpose.

The wisdom of God is displayed in his secret transactions with Christ in the covenant of grace; it appears in making such a covenant which is "ordered in all things", for his own glory, the glory of the three divine persons, Father, Son, and Spirit; and for the good of his people in time, and for their everlasting happiness, hereafter; being stored with promises and blessings of all sorts, peculiarly suitable for them: in appointing Christ to be the Mediator and Surety of it, and putting the said promises and blessings into his hands, and also their persons, for safety and security; all which were done in eternity. But,

2b. Secondly, The wisdom of God is more clearly manifested in his visible works in time; "O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" (Ps. 104:24). And,

b1. It appears in the works of creation: the making of the heavens and the earth is always ascribed to the wisdom, understanding, and discretion of God (Ps. 136:5; Prov. 3:19, 20; Jer. 10:12). Whole volumes have been written on this subject, the wisdom of God in creation; and more might; the subject is not exhausted. If we look up to the starry heavens, and the luminaries, the work of his fingers, curiously wrought; as what are wrought with the fingers of men usually are; we may observe

a wonderful display of divine wisdom; in the sun that rules by day, and in the moon that rules by night, and in the stars also; all which shed their benign influences on the earth: particularly in the sun, the fountain of heat and light; in the situation of it, not so far from the earth as to be of no use to it, nor so near as to hurt it; in its circular motion, either about our earth, or on its own axis, whereby nothing is hid from the heat and light of it, at one time or another; and which performs its revolutions so punctually, and with so much regularity, and so exactly answers the end of its destination, that it seems as if it was wise and knowing itself; "the sun knoweth his going down" (Ps. 104:19). If we descend into the airy region, and could but enter into the treasures of the snow and rain, which God has in reserve there, and wisely distributes on the earth at proper times; how he binds up the water in his thick cloud, and the cloud is not rent with the weight thereof; how he balances and poises these ponderous bodies, that they are not overset, and burst, and fall with their own weight; by which they would wash away cities, towns, and villages, and the fruits of the earth; but causes them to descend in gentle showers, and in small drops; whereby the earth becomes fruitful; we cannot but observe amazing wisdom. If we come down to the earth, we may behold, besides men, the innumerable inhabitants of it, placed on it to cultivate it; "the cattle on a thousand hills"; the pastures covered with flocks; the valleys clothed with grain; grass growing for the beasts, and vegetation for the service of man; "wine to make his heart glad; oil to cause his face to shine; and bread that strengthens his heart": and in the bowels of it, metals and minerals of divers sorts, gold, silver, brass, and iron, for artificers that work in each of them; and all for the use, and to increase the wealth of men: the wisdom, as well as the goodness of God, must be discerned. The structure of the bodies of creatures is very wonderfully fitted for their different actions and uses; fishes for swimming, birds for flying, beasts for walking and running; some more slowly, and some more swiftly; but especially the texture of the human body, in all its parts, is very surprising, it being "curiously wrought"; no embroidery, or work with a needle, exceeding it: the organs of the eye are admirably fitted for seeing; the parts of the ear for hearing; the instruments of speech, the tongue, mouth, and lips, for speaking; the hands and arms for working, and feet for walking; as well as all the other parts of the body, framed and disposed for various services; to which may be added, the subserviency of all creatures to one another, and especially to man, for whose sake the world was made, and all things in it; it was designed for an habitation for him, and was made and furnished with every thing for his use and service, for his convenience and pleasure, before he was created; and when he was created, in the image of God, dominion was given him over the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the air, the beasts of the field; the herbage of the earth was provided both for food and medicine; the cattle, some for food, some for clothing, some for transportation, and some for cultivation of the earth; and all were made for the glory of God, as the ultimate end; "for his pleasure they are and were created", (Rev. 4:11) and all his works, in their way, praise him, declare his glory, and show forth his handywork.

2b2. Secondly, The wisdom of God appears in the works of providence. It may be observed in the various returning seasons; seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,

summer and winter, night and day; which keep their constant revolutions and stated course; scarce anything ever preposterous. Rain is given from heaven, and fruitful seasons. In some of the Eastern countries, as in Canaan, rain fell but twice a year, called the former and latter rain; the one when the seed was sown, to bring it up, the other just before harvest, to fatten the grain; and both constantly fell at their usual and appointed times: and where rain is very scarce, as in Egypt, the river Nile overflows its banks at a certain time of the year; which leaving a slime, makes the earth fruitful, and answers all the purposes of rain. The provision made for all creatures, suitable to their natures, is an abundant proof of the wisdom of God: as it requires wisdom, as well as faithfulness, in a steward, to give to everyone under his care their portion of meat in due season; so the wisdom of God is wonderfully displayed, not only in filling mens' hearts with food and gladness; but in giving to the beasts their food, everyone agreeable to their nature, "and to the young ravens that cry"; in opening his hand of providence and satisfying the desires of all living; in giving largely and liberally, and in a proper time, meat to all whose eyes wait on him; even his vast numerous family of creatures. He has the charge over the earth, and disposes of the whole world, and all things in it; he sits on the circle of the earth, and beholds all that are in it, and that are done in it; he places men in different stations of life, so as to have a dependance upon, and a connection with each other: he wisely governs, rules and overrules all things, for the mutual good of men, and his own glory: he does all things after the counsel of his will, in the wisest and best manner, and to answer the best ends and purposes; he orders the various scenes of prosperity and adversity, and sets the one against the other; so that there is no finding any thing after him, or making them otherwise and better than they are; particularly, he maketh all things work together for the good of his people; for the trial of their grace, and to make them meet for glory; nor is there anyone trial or exercise they meet with, but what there is a necessity of it, and is for the best; yea, there is infinite wisdom in the most intricate providences, and which are now difficult to account for, and to reconcile to the promises and perfections of God; but when the mystery of providence is finished, and the judgments of God are made manifest, and all are seen in one view, in an harmonious connection together; the wisdom of God, in every part, will appear striking and amazing; as when a man looks on the wrong side of a piece of tapestry, or only views it in detached pieces; he is scarcely able to make anything of it; nor can he discern art and beauty in it; but when it is all put together, and viewed on its right side, the wisdom, the contrivance, and art of the maker are observed with admiration.

2c. Thirdly, The wisdom of God is to be seen in the great work of redemption and salvation by Christ; "herein he hath abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence" (Eph. 1:7, 8). Wisdom and prudence are displayed in other works of God; but in this "all" wisdom and prudence, and that in abundance, and which appear,

2c1. In settling upon the person to be the Redeemer; not any of the sinful race of men, for they all having sinned, all need a Redeemer; nor can anyone redeem himself, and much less redeem another: nor any of the angels; for whatever goodwill

they might bear to such work, none were equal to it; and therefore God put no trust in them, nor committed any such trust unto them; but his own Son, him he appointed and foreordained to be the Redeemer of his chosen people; the middle person in the Trinity, and most proper to be the Mediator; the Word that was in the beginning with God, and was God, and by whom all things were made, and so equal to such an undertaking; the Son of God; and it was more seemly and suitable to his relation and character, as a Son, to be appointed, to be sent, and to obey, than either of the other persons, and particularly the Father; and by having two natures, divine and human, united in one person, the Immanuel, God with us, God manifest in the flesh, he was the fittest person to be employed in this service; partaking of both natures, he was the only proper person to be the Mediator between God and Man, to be the man to do it, and lay his hand on both, and reconcile those two parties at variance, and to do what respected both, even "things pertaining to God, and to make reconciliation for the sins of the people". Being man, he could have compassion, as he had, on the lost miserable race of men, and in his love and pity redeem them; he was capable of being made under the law, and yielding obedience to it; which, being broken by the sin of men, was necessary to his redemption of them, and of suffering the penalty of the law, death; both which have been done by him, and thereby the law is magnified, and made more honourable, than it could have been by the obedience of all the angels in heaven, or by the sufferings of all the damned in hell; and hereby also satisfaction was made for sin, in the same nature that sinned, which seemed necessary, or, however, it was a wise disposition, that so it should be. But what most of all displays the wisdom of God in this affair, is, that since all human nature was depraved and corrupted with sin, how a clean and sinless nature could be produced out of an unclean one, which yet was necessary to making atonement for sin in it; which difficulty infinite wisdom, and almighty power, have surmounted by Christ's birth of a virgin, under the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost; whence what was born of her was the Holy Thing, and so could be, and was offered up, without spot to God. Add to this, that it was not an human person, but an human nature, Christ assumed; it was flesh he took, the seed of Abraham, and is called the Holy Thing, but not a person; it never subsisted of itself, but from the moment of its production was taken into union with the person of the Son of God; which was wisely ordered for our good, and the glory of God; for had it been a distinct person of itself, the actions and sufferings of it would have been finite, and of no benefit to mankind; his righteousness would have been, though pure and spotless, but the righteousness of a creature; and could have been of no use, but to itself: whereas, through the union of the human nature to the person of the Son of God, it became the righteousness of God, and so imputable to many. Once more, through Christ's being man, he became our near kinsman, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone; and so the right of redemption belonged to him; hence the same word "Goel", in the Hebrew language, signifies both a redeemer and a near kinsman.

But then the person settled upon to be the Redeemer, is God as well as man; and so as he had pity for men as man, he had a zeal for God and his glory, as a divine person; and would be, as he was, concerned for the glorifying all his divine

perfections, one as well as another. Being God, he could put an infinite virtue into his actions and sufferings, as man, whereby the end of them would be sufficiently answered. Hence his righteousness is the righteousness of God, and is unto all, and upon all them that believe; his blood, the blood of the Son of God, which cleanses from all sin; his sacrifice, the sacrifice of his whole human nature, in union with himself, a divine person; and so sufficient to put away sin, by a full satisfaction for it; being God, he could support the human nature, under the weight of all the sins of his people, and of all the wrath and punishment due unto them; which otherwise must have been intolerable. Being the mighty God, he was mighty to save, and his own arm has wrought out salvation. The great God is our Saviour. Now the finding out such a fit person to be the Redeemer of men, is to be ascribed solely to the wisdom of God: had all men been summoned together, and this declared unto them, that God was willing they should be redeemed, could they settle upon a proper person to redeem them; and had the angels been called in to assist with their counsel, after long consultation, they would never have been able to have proposed one fit for this work; for who could have thought of the Son of God, and proposed his becoming man, and suffering, and dying in the stead of men, to redeem them? this is "nodus deo vindice dignus"; what God only could have found out; and he claims it to himself; "I", the only wise God, "have found a ransom" (Job 33:24; Ps. 89:19, 20).

2c2. The wisdom of God appears in the persons fixed upon to be redeemed; not all men, but some; partly to show the sovereignty of God, in redeeming whom he pleases; and partly, since all had sinned, and were deserving of death, to glorify his grace and mercy in the redemption of some, and his justice in the destruction of others; and in both to show that he could, in right, have destroyed them all, if he pleased; and likewise, that it might appear he was no respecter of persons, he has not limited the grace of redemption to any particular family or nation; but has redeemed some out of every nation, tongue, kindred, and people; and whereas his view therein is to magnify the riches of his grace, in order to show the freeness of it; he sent Christ to die for, and redeem, not the good and the righteous, who appeared so to themselves and others, but ungodly sinners, the worst and chief of sinners (Rom. 5:6-8, 10).

2c3. The wisdom of God may be observed in the way and manner in which redemption is obtained; which being by the price of the blood of Christ, and in a way of full satisfaction to law and justice; the different claims of mercy and justice, which seemed to clash with one another, are reconciled: mercy insisting that the sinner be pardoned and saved, that it might be glorified; and justice requiring that the law should take place, its sentence be executed, and punishment inflicted, that so the rights and honours of law and justice might be maintained; which, by this happy method wisdom has settled upon, they both agree; "mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." Sin is condemned in the flesh of Christ, vengeance is taken on it, punishment inflicted for it, and yet the sinner saved from sin, from condemnation, wrath, and ruin. Redemption is also wrought out in a way most mortifying to Satan. Through envy he sought the ruin of men; contrived it,

brought it about, and triumphed in it: but what a mortification must it be to that proud spirit, that one of the woman's seed he had ruined, should bruise his head; that the Son of God should be manifested in human nature, to destroy his works, to destroy himself, to spoil his principalities, and redeem mankind; and be exalted in the same nature, to the highest pitch of honour and glory imaginable; to sit at the right hand of God; angels, authorities, principalities, and powers, subject to him!

2c4. The wisdom of God is to be discerned in the time of man's redemption; which was the most opportune and seasonable; it was in due time; in the fulness of time fixed and agreed upon between the Father and the Son, and must be the fittest; it was after the faith and patience of God's people had been sufficiently tried, even for the space of four thousand years from the first hint of a Redeemer; after the Saviour, and his sacrifice, had been prefigured, by types, shadows, and sacrifices, for so long a time, and the use, end, and efficacy of sacrifices had been sufficiently known, and God would have them no longer; then said Christ, "Lo, I come", &c. when the Gentile world was covered with darkness, blindness, and ignorance, and abounded with all kind of wickedness; when immorality, formality, hypocrisy, and neglect of the word and worship of God among the Jews prevailed; by all which it may be most clearly seen, there was need of a Saviour and Redeemer; for "who can declare his generation", the wickedness of it? then, in the infinite wisdom of God, Christ was sent to redeem sinners.

2d. Fourthly, The wisdom of God shines in the Gospel, the good news of salvation by Christ; in its doctrines, and in its ordinances; that itself is called, "the wisdom of God in a mystery; the hidden wisdom; the manifold wisdom of God"; (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:10) every doctrine is a display of it; to instance only in justification, and the pardon of sin. Justification is by the free grace of God, and yet in strict justice; grace provided Christ to work out a righteousness; grace accepts of it in the room and stead of sinners, and grace imputes it to them: the righteousness of Christ, by which men are justified, is commensurate to the law and justice of God; so that "God is just, while the justifier of him that believes in Jesus": the grace of faith is wisely appointed to receive this righteousness; it is of faith, that it might appear to be of grace, and that pride and boasting might be excluded; which, had any other been appointed, would not have been so apparent; this being a soul humbling, a soul emptying grace, which receives all from God, and gives him all the glory: pardon of sin is of free grace, and yet through the blood of Christ; and is both an act of grace and of justice; God is just and faithful to forgive it, as well as gracious and merciful; he forgives sin, and takes vengeance on the inventions of the sinner: pardon proceeds upon the foot of satisfaction, which grace provides; and so both grace and justice agree in it, and are glorified by it: the ordinances of the Gospel are wisely instituted to answer the end of them; baptism to represent the overwhelming sufferings of Christ, his burial, and resurrection from the dead: the ordinance of the supper, to show forth his death; the bread broken is a proper emblem of his broken body; the wine poured out, of his blood shed, and his soul poured out unto death for sinners. Wisely has God appointed men, and not angels, to minister the word and administer ordinances; "men of the same passions with others"; who may be heard

and conversed with, without dread and terror; frail, mortal men, earthen vessels, in which this treasure is put, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of men; and a standing ministry is wisely fixed, to be continued to the end of the world, for the use, relief, refreshment, and comfort of God's people, as well as the conversion of sinners; and all for the glory of God.

2e. Fifthly, The wisdom of God may be seen in the government and preservation of the church of God, in all ages; in guiding them by immediate revelation, without the written word, when the church was in a few families, and the lives of men long; then with written laws, statutes, and ordinances, suited to the infant state of the church, among the people of Israel; and now with ordinances, more agreeable to its adult state, under the gospel dispensation, throughout the world: and as it is a church and kingdom not of this world, it is supported, not by worldly, but spiritual means; and wonderfully has it been preserved, in all ages, and increased, amidst all the persecutions of men; no weapon formed against it has prospered; and God has made it, and will still more make it to appear, that he rules in Jacob unto the ends of the earth.