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John Gill's

A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 25

OF THE BLESSEDNESS OF GOD.

That the nature of God is most blessed, as well as eternal, Epicurus himself asserted; and Velleius, an Epicurean, in Cicero, is made to say, that nothing can be thought of more blessed than the life of God, nor more abounding with all good things: he rejoices in his own wisdom and virtue, and assuredly knows that he ever shall be in the highest and eternal pleasures: this God, says he, we rightly call blessed; thought he wrongly represents him as neither doing nor designing any thing. Euryphamus, a Pythagorean philosopher, more clearly expresses himself; God, says he, needs no external cause; for he is $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota$ by nature good, and $\varphi\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota$, by nature blessed, and is of himself perfect. From this attribute of blessedness the scriptures often style God the "blessed" One, and "the blessed God"; Christ is called, "the Son of the Blessed", (Mark 14:61, 62) the Creator of all things is said to be, "God blessed for ever", (Rom. 1:25; 2 Cor. 11:31; 1 Tim. 1:11) and Christ, as a divine person, is so called, (Rom. 9:5) and nothing is more common with the Jews, in their writings and prayers, than to speak of God as the holy and blessed God. This attribute may be strongly concluded from the last treated of; for if God is a sufficient, and self-sufficient, and an all-sufficient Being, he must be happy; as well as from all the perfections of God put together, before discoursed of; his simplicity, immutability, infinity, eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, justice, holiness, truth, and faithfulness, all-sufficiency and perfection; he that is possessed of all these, and in whom no perfection is wanting, must needs be completely blessed. It might be argued from his sovereign, extensive, and endless power and dominion; and from that light, glory, and majesty with which he is arrayed; by all which he is described, (1 Tim. 6:15, 16) "who is the blessed and only potentate", &c. he is a "potentate", has power over others, but is not under the power of any; he is higher than the highest, the most high God; he is over angels and men; he rules in his own right, in right of creation; not by a delegated power; "who hath given him a charge over the

earth? or who hath disposed the whole world?" (Job 34:13) he has the charge of the earth, and disposes of the whole world, and all persons and things in it; but has his authority for it of himself, and not another; he has no rival, competitor, nor partner with him in his throne; he is not accountable to any, nor to be controlled by any; he is "King of kings, and Lord of lords"; and so most blessed and happy as a potentate; and as such will always continue. "Who only hath immortality" of himself, and gives it to others: and what mars the happiness of the greatest potentates on earth is, that they must and do die, like other men, (Ps. 82:6, 7) and such is his light and splendour he is clothed with, so striking and dazzling, that none can bear to come unto it, and gaze upon it; "dwelling in the light" of his own essence; for he is light itself; and such is his glory and terrible majesty, as, that "no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see"; and which glory arises not from any single perfection of his, as his holiness, or any other, but from an assemblage of them all (see Ex. 33:18, 19, 34:6, 7). In which glory lies his complete and perfect happiness; and which he gives not to another. The blessedness of God may be considered,

1. First, As it is in himself; and lies chiefly in these two things, in a freedom from all evils, and in the possession of all good things.

1a. In a freedom from all evils; particularly, from the evil of evils, sin; and so from all the consequences of it. Sin is an evil and bitter thing in its own nature; it is exceeding sinful, and extremely pernicious; it is the source of all disorders, disasters, distresses, and calamities that befall any of the creatures; sin has made some of the angels, and Adam and his posterity, once in a most happy state, exceeding unhappy; and it is the infelicity of good men, in the present state, that sin dwells in them, which wars against there, breaks their peace and comfort, and mars their happiness, and obliges them to say, "O wretched" men that we are! but God is just and true, there is no iniquity in him, (Deut. 32:4) no darkness of this kind at all to eclipse his light, glory, and felicity: as holiness is the happiness of the elect angels, and glorified saints, who, being thoroughly holy, are completely happy; so even the most consummate and perfect holiness, is the happiness of God; yea, he is so happy as not to be tempted with the evil of sin, nor can be, (James 1:13) whereas good men, in the present state, are often sadly harassed, and made unhappy, by Satan's temptations; being sifted by him as wheat is sifted; and so much trouble is given them, by being buffeted by him, and having his fiery darts thrown at them; but God is out of the reach of all; and as he is not affected with sin, nor can be tempted to it, so he is clear from all the evil consequences of it, all hurts and damages by it.

Such is his "knowledge" of all things, that he cannot make choice of anything that will be to his detriment; men, through ignorance, mistaking one thing for another, choose what is abominable, and issues in their hurt and ruin: and such is his "wisdom", that he cannot be imposed upon, circumvented, deceived, and drawn into anything that may make him unhappy; as Eve was, through the subtlety of the serpent; but "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord", (Prov. 21:30) and such is his power, that he cannot be overcome, nor

oppressed by any: with respect to men, there is, oftentimes, "power on the side of their oppressors", to crush and distress them, and make them unhappy; but there is no power superior to the divine Being, to do him the least hurt, or give him the least uneasiness. It has been observed, that properly speaking, there are no affections and passions in God to be wrought upon, or worked up, so as to disturb and disquiet him, as there are in creatures; such as grief and sorrow indulged, and wrath and anger provoked, and raised to a pitch; these are only ascribed to God, speaking after the manner of men; and because some things are done by God similar to what are done by men, when they are grieved and provoked to wrath, &c. otherwise, he is invariably and unchangeably the same, and so most blessed for evermore.

1b. His blessedness lies in the possession of all good. He has all good in him; he comprehends all that can be called good; he stands in no need of anything; he is perfect and entire, wanting nothing; he is the fountain of all goodness; all good things come from him; he gives all things richly to enjoy; he is good, and does good, yea, he is good to all; he gives to all, and receives from none; and therefore must be happy; for "it is more blessed to give than to receive", according to the saying of Christ, (Acts 20:35) he is the "summum bonum", the chief, the chiefest good; in whom only happiness is to be found; when all nature is surveyed, and every place and thing searched into, it can be thought to be in God only, and he is found to be that; "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that desire besides thee" (Ps. 73:25). Such and such persons, in such and such circumstances, may be thought to be happy; but happy, thrice happy, are the people whose God is the Lord! who, besides the good things he bestows on them here, he has laid up such goodness for them hereafter, which the heart of man cannot conceive of. How blessed and happy then must he himself be! name whatsoever it may be thought happiness consists in, and it will be found in God in its full perfection. Does it lie in grandeur and dominion? with God is terrible majesty; he is the blessed and only potentate; his kingdom rules over all, and is an everlasting one. Does it lie in wealth and riches? "The gold is mine, and the silver is mine, saith the Lord", (Hag. 2:8) all the gold and silver in the world, that, and all the fulness of it, are his; the riches of both Indies are his property; the mines and metals of the earth, the fowls of the heaven, the beasts of the field, and "the cattle on a thousand hills", in the latter of which the substance of men formerly lay (Ps. 24:1, 50:10-12). Does it lie in wisdom and knowledge, where Solomon sought for happiness, and had of all men the greatest share of it? these are in God in the highest perfection; "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33). Does it lie in might, power, and strength, as Samson's excellency did? God is "mighty in strength: if I speak of strength", says Job, "Lo, he is strong"; there is no strength nor power comparable to his; "Who is a strong Lord like unto thee?" (Job 9:4, 19; Ps. 89:8). Does it lie in pleasure; in which also Solomon sought for it, but found it not? "In the presence of God is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore", (Ps. 16:11) and if such as to make his creatures happy, angels and men, then certainly to make himself happy also. Does it lie in fame, in credit, and the high esteem of others? How excellent is the name of God in all the earth! his works praise

him, his saints bless him, angels celebrate his glory; yea, his glory is above the heavens; his name is great from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same.

To happiness knowledge is necessary; whatever excellencies may be in creatures, if they know them not, they are not happy in them. Hence happiness is denied of brutes; for though there are many things which they excel in, as strength, swiftness, &c. as the horse and the mule, yet being without understanding, are not happy: but God knows all the excellencies and perfections in his nature; there is no searching of his understanding, and therefore most happy. That happiness is the greatest which is independent; the happiness of angels and men is dependent on God; they have nothing but what they have received, and therefore cannot glory, as though they received it not; and this is a restraint upon, and a limitation of their happiness: but the happiness of God is infinite and independent; of him, and through him, and for him, are all things (Rom. 11:36). Add to all this, that his blessedness endures for ever; he is God blessed for ever, from everlasting to everlasting: could his happiness cease, or be known that it would, it would detract from it, even for the present; but this can no more cease than his Being.

2. Secondly, What may serve further to prove and illustrate the blessedness of God is, that he is the cause of all blessedness in his creatures, angels and men. Angels have their beings from him; it is he that has made them the spirits they are, and what excellencies, as of wisdom, knowledge, strength, &c. they have, are all from him; that they are chosen in Christ, and confirmed by grace in him, see the face of God, and enjoy his favour, in which their greatest blessedness lies, all flow from his sovereign will and pleasure. The temporal happiness of men is from him; that they have a being, are preserved in it, and have all the necessaries and comforts of life; that they are blessed in basket and store; that they have health and wealth, and an increase in their families, flocks, and herds; on account of which it behooves them to say, "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits" (Ps. 68:19). Their spiritual blessings come from him, who is himself their covenant God and Father, the chief of their blessings, and therefore cannot want any good thing, nor need fear any evil they have Christ, and all the blessings of goodness with him; the Spirit, and all his graces, faith, hope, and love, joy and peace; the blessings of pardoning grace, and a justifying righteousness, and in which their blessedness greatly lies, and from whence peace and comfort flow (Rom. 4:6-8, 5:1, 11). They are blessed also with the word and ordinances; which are the means of increasing grace, and spiritual peace; and hereafter will be blessed with eternal happiness; with the blessed hope, or the blessedness laid up in heaven, they are hoping for, which they enter upon at death, and enjoy to all eternity. Now if such blessedness comes from God, how blessed must he be in himself!

3. Thirdly, God is his own blessedness; it is wholly within himself and of himself; he receives none from without himself, or from his creatures; nothing that can add to his happiness; and he himself is the blessedness of his creatures, who are made happy by him; whose blessedness lies in likeness to him; which is begun in this life, in regeneration; when newly born souls are made partakers of the divine nature, is

increased by sights of the glory of God in Christ, and will be perfected in the future state, when they shall awake in his likeness, and bear his image in a more perfect manner: and also it lies in communion with God; it is the happiness of saints now, and what they exult in, when they enjoy it, that their fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; and it will be the blessedness of the new Jerusalem state, that the tabernacle of God will be with men, and he will dwell with them; and of the ultimate glory the saints shall then have, everlasting and uninterrupted communion with Father, Son, and Spirit, and partake of endless pleasures in the divine presence: and it will, moreover, lie in the vision of God; which, because of the happiness of it, is usually called the beatific vision; when they shall "see God for themselves, and not another"; see him as he is in Christ, and behold the glory of Christ; see no more darkly through a glass, but face to face, and know as they are known. Wherefore,

4. Fourthly, God is pronounced, declared, and owned to be blessed, by all his creatures; hence the frequent form of blessing him used, "Blessed be the Lord God", &c. (Gen. 9:26; Ps. 72:18; Luke 1:68; Eph. 1:3). Thus he is blessed by angels, who, as they are called upon to bless him, do ascribe honour, glory, and blessing to him, (Ps. 103:20; Rev. 5:11, 12, 7:11, 12) and by the saints, who call upon their souls, and all within them, to bless his holy name for all benefits bestowed upon them (Ps. 103:1-3, 145:10). Which is done, not by invoking a blessing on him; for there is none greater than he, to invoke and ask one of, much less by conferring any upon him; for as he needs none, a creature can give him nothing but what is his own. Besides, without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the greater; the creature of the Creator, and not the Creator of the creature: but this is done by congratulating his greatness and blessedness, and ascribing it to him, and praising him for all blessings, temporal and spiritual, bestowed on them by him; and which, as they come from him, are proofs of the blessedness that is in him. And here ends the account of the attributes of God; which all centre and terminate in his blessedness.