

CHAPTER VIII

THE INDEPENDENCY OF GOD

GOD is the one and only independent Being. We speak of rich men as being independent, but in reality no creature is independent. Webster defines the adjective "independent" as follows: "Not dependent; free; not subject to control by others; not relying on others; not subordinate; self-governing; sovereign; not contingent or conditioned," etc. Now God is the only Being to whom this definition can be absolutely applied.

The independency of God does not preclude the employment of His creatures in accomplishing His will, but it means that He does not depend upon them; He does not have to use them. The popular expression, "God is depending on us," makes Him weaker than we are. God may use us in furthering His cause, but what He does with us He could as easily do without us. God derives no power or wisdom from His creatures. *"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"* (Rom. 11:34,35).

Paul says: *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us"* (II Cor. 4:7). The Gospel is proclaimed by lips of clay, but the power of conversion is not in the man who speaks: *"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God"* (I Cor. 2:4,5). Faith is not the result of man's persuasive powers; it is a fruit of the Spirit: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,"* (Gal. 5:22). The new birth is not the result of man's will, or the will of the flesh: *"Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"* (John 1:13), *"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures"* (James 1:18). For success in the ministry God does not depend upon the preacher; the preacher must depend upon God.

That Worn-out Farm

The story is told of a man who bought a run-down farm in Virginia. For three years he worked hard and finally was able to produce the necessities of life. One day he was visited by his pastor. As he took him over the farm, pointing out here and there patches and fields of good crops, the pastor remarked several times that it looked as if he and the Lord were partners in farming. As the preacher took his leave, the old farmer said, "Reverend, I agree with all you say about me and the

Lord being in partnership. I agree with every word. But reverend, I jest wishes you could a seen this place when the Lord was running it by Hissself!" This irreverent joke has no place in the pulpit as teaching that God had to depend upon the farmer for good crops. That worn out land was not God's exhibit of what He was able to do. It was natural retribution for the abuse of what God had made. The thorns and briars and weeds that had grown on that run down farm were a reminder of sin. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field" (Gen. 3:17,18). They did not speak of what God could produce, but of what man deserves. God made the earth fruitful of good; sin caused it to abound in thorns and thistles. A run down farm does not represent the best God can do. God used the farmer in producing good crops, but He did not depend on Him.

Moses cautioned Israel against saying: "*And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day*" (Deut. 8:17,18). Also our Savior taught us to pray: "*Give us this day our daily bread*" (Matt. 6:11).

There must be some way to preach the truth of human responsibility without begetting pride in the creature and without dethroning God. We must not preach one truth at the cost of another truth. Man is a responsible creature. He is responsible to do all God commands. Man is responsible to work for his bread, but after all his work he is dependent upon God for his bread. No man, who can work, has the right to expect bread apart from work; not because God cannot give bread without work, but because He will not put a premium on laziness. "*For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat*" (II Thess. 3:10). That God can give food apart from human work is seen in the fall of the manna in the wilderness, "And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat" (Exo. 16:14-15) and the feeding of Elijah by the ravens. "And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there" (I Kings 17:4). Of God we can truly sing. "He sits on no precarious throne, Nor borrows leave to be."

To further amplify the subject of God's independence, let us divide it into two branches:

Self-existence and Self-sufficiency.

God is Self-Existent

Every being must have a ground for its existence, either in or out of itself. The ground of man's existence is outside of himself; he does not cause himself to exist. Man is dependent on something outside of himself for existence, but God is not thus dependent. To be sure the self existence of God is incomprehensible to us, too much for the finite mind to grasp. But a self-existent person is not as great a mystery as a self-existent thing such as Herbert Spencer supposes the universe to be. It is easier to see how matter is derived from mind than to see how mind is derived from matter.

The ground of God's existence is not in His will, but in His nature. He did not will Himself into being; it is His nature to exist. He exists naturally and therefore necessarily.

God is Self-Sufficient

The self-existent Being must, of necessity, be self-sufficient. God is sufficient for His own support, glory, and happiness. "*For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen*" (Rom. 11:36). God comprehends in Himself all excellencies, perfections, and happiness. "*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him*" (Col. 1:16).

It is very necessary to distinguish between what God is in His essential being, and what He is declared to be by His creation. "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork*" (Ps. 19:1), but they add nothing to it. Men are to ascribe glory to God in their eating and drinking: "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (I Cor. 10:31), but this is not any addition to His glory, but a mere recognition and acknowledgment of it. In Judges we have the exhortation, but this does not denote that God was in need of man's help, but that it is man's duty to serve God. "*Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel*" (Ps. 78:41), but this only imports their attitude of mistrust. They acted as though God was limited in power and could not take care of them in the wilderness. Moreover, they limited Him in His authority, that is, they acted as if He did not have the right to make certain commands upon them; they showed by their murmurings that they were displeased with His providences. "*And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness*" (Exo. 16:2); "*How long shall I bear with this evil*

congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me" (Num. 14:27). In the same passage it is charged that they tempted God, "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice" (Num. 14:22). that is, they acted as if He could be tempted. In unbelief they put Him to the proof.

God is Essentially Blessed

He is called the blessed or happy God, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust" (I Tim. 1:11); "Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;" (I Tim. 6:15). This happiness can neither be added to nor destroyed. Sin merits and receives His displeasure, but it does not destroy His happiness. Righteousness in His moral creatures may and does receive His approbation, but it adds nothing to His essential happiness and glory. He was happy and glorious before there were any creatures, and He will remain happy even when hell is filled with the wicked. God's happiness rests upon three facts:

1. There is no moral conflict in God.

"Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). God is at peace with Himself. He is infinite in wisdom and spends no time in grieving over mistakes. He is infinite in holiness and knows no remorse for sin. While there are three persons in the Godhead, they are an absolute unity and in perfect accord. Peace is the great desideratum of the human race, but it belongs essentially to God. He is called the God of peace: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). And there is harmony among all His attributes. "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10).

2. God knows no limitations.

He is never at the end of Himself. His resources are never diminished. He never faces an emergency. He knows nothing of crises. He never resorts to any new deal, for His plans and purposes are all eternal. Wisdom designed all His plans, and His power executes them, therefore "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). There never was a time when God wondered what He would or could do. He has no experiment station where He learns what is best, for He naturally knows what is best. In all these points man is in striking contrast to God. We are straitened in ourselves, often at our wit's end and helpless. We are limited

in power and wisdom. We are limited in time, but God is the King of Eternity. Joshua wanted time to get his day's work done, and God lengthened the day for him. *"Then spake Joshua to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher? So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day"* (Josh. 10:12,13). Napoleon, at Waterloo, saw the shadows of the evening falling upon his defeated army and is reported to have said, "O that I had the power of Joshua to retard the march of the sun one hour!"

3. God's happiness consists of His holiness.

Sin destroys happiness. Look at Adam and Eve in Eden *"And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed"* (Gen. 2:8), before and after their sin. *"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden"* (Gen. 3:8). Nothing to mar their happiness until sin came. Sin promises happiness but cannot produce it. *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom. 5:12). Sin is breaking with God, and since God is the fountain and source of all true happiness, when man broke with Him, he lost peace and joy. No man in his natural state, as a sinner, has any true peace and joy. These are fruits of the Spirit: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith"* (Gal. 5:22). The people of God will not be perfectly happy until they are completely saved, and this will not be until they are conformed to the image of Christ in resurrection glory. *"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness"* (Ps. 17:15). *"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin"* (Rom. 4:8).

Satan gives a counterfeit happiness. He has built a fool's paradise in this world for his dupes. But the ever happy God will make His children genuinely and eternally happy in a real and lasting paradise. His grace has satisfied us with the imputed righteousness of His Son for justification, and has also created a thirst within us for personal righteousness, and that thirst will be satisfied when we are glorified. Here is His promise: *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matt. 5:6) . What a joy to know that we shall some day be as good as we now want to be!