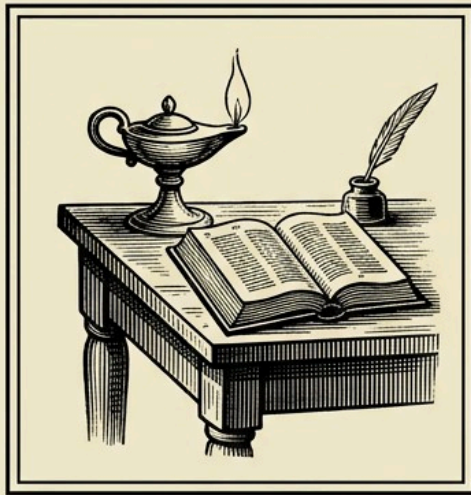


CASES OF CONSCIENCE PART 1

WILLIAM PERKINS



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William Perkins



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A landmark Puritan treatise on **casuistry** — the art of resolving troubled consciences. Perkins addresses three foundational questions: how a person enters God's favor and is saved, how one may be **assured of salvation**, and how the distressed soul finds comfort in affliction. Opening with a critique of Roman Catholic confession, the work grounds every answer in Scripture, offering sound direction for believers wrestling with guilt, doubt, and spiritual despair.



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TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL SIR
EDWARD DENNY, KNIGHT



There is no doctrine revealed in the word of God, or taught by the prophets and apostles, more useful and important for human life than the one that shows how to relieve and correct the conscience. The benefit this brings to the church of God is beyond description. First, it helps diagnose the cure for the most dangerous wound possible: a wounded spirit. Solomon speaks from experience about how great a burden this is, saying that a person's spirit can sustain physical suffering, but who can bear a wounded spirit? His meaning is that no outward grief can fall upon a person that will not be endured with patience, as long as the mind is not troubled or dismayed. But once the spirit is touched, and the heart — which, when sound, is the very fountain of peace for the whole person — is struck with fear of God's wrath because of sin, the grief becomes so great and the burden so unbearable that no outward remedy can ease or soothe it. Second, this doctrine gives specific and sound direction for every particular case, whether a person is walking with God in the immediate duties of worship, or living among others in family, church, or commonwealth. Paul makes clear how powerfully the lack of this direction can turn otherwise good actions into sins on the part of those who

do them, in his general conclusion: Whatever is not of faith is sin. By this he teaches that whatever a person does or undertakes in life — whether it concerns the knowledge and worship of God, or any particular duty to be performed through their calling for the common good — if they lack sufficient warrant and assurance of conscience, grounded in God's word, that it ought or ought not to be done, then to them it is sin. Third, when rightly used, this doctrine is the most comforting of all. It is not built on human opinions and shifting ideas, nor does it consist of conclusions that are only probable and speculative — for a doubting or distressed conscience cannot be settled and corrected by such things. Instead, it rests on the most sufficient and certain foundations drawn from the very word of God, which is powerful in its working, piercing the heart and discerning its thoughts and intentions. The word alone is able to quiet the mind and give full satisfaction to the conscience. And as great as the benefit is, the absence of this doctrine — along with the true manner of applying it — has been and continues to be the cause of many serious problems. Even among those who fear God and have come to believe, there are many who in times of distress, having considered the weight and desert of their sins and felt the wrath of God they deserved, were brought to desperate straits — mourning, wailing, and crying out as if God had forsaken them — until they were relieved by the Spirit of Christ through meditation on God's word and promises. But especially those who were not instructed in the knowledge of truth, nor acquainted with how God deals with His distressed children — when through ignorance and blindness in matters of religion, God loosed the cord of their consciences and set before their eyes both the number of their sins and the just anger of God they had in-

curred — what did they do? Despairing of their own condition and of God's mercy, they either fell into frenzy and madness, or chose terrible ends for themselves: some by hanging, some by drowning, others by killing themselves. And even apart from grief and anguish of mind, many who had some measure of knowledge and obedience still failed, for want of proper resolution in particular cases within their callings. They either abused or entirely abandoned their callings and so became a stumbling block and offense to others.

Since this is a matter of great weight and importance, it is fitting that the best and most effective approach be taken in teaching and applying it. In this regard, we have good reason to challenge the Roman Catholic Church, which has erred in both the substance and the circumstances of this doctrine in its case writings, as will become clear in what follows. First, they assign the duty of relieving the conscience to the sacrificial priest — who, though by their own canons he is supposed to be a man of knowledge and free from reproach, is often in practice either unlearned, or wicked and corrupt in his conduct, and therefore unfit for such a purpose. Second, they teach that priests appointed as comforters and relievers of the distressed are made by Christ Himself to be judges of cases of conscience, holding in their own hands a judicial power and authority to truly and properly bind or loose, to remit or retain sins, to open or shut the kingdom of heaven. This is a blasphemous doctrine. Christ alone holds the keys of David, which truly and properly opens and no man shuts, and truly and properly shuts and no man opens. The ministers of God are not called to be absolute judges of the conscience, but only messengers and ambassadors of reconciliation. It follows, therefore, that they cannot be

the authors and givers of the forgiveness of sins, but only ministers and dispensers of the same. Third, the Roman Catholics have scattered throughout their writings various false and erroneous doctrines that are deeply harmful to directing and resolving the conscience in time of need. These are as follows. First: that a person, in the course of his life, may build himself on the faith of his teachers, and for his salvation rest content with an implicit and unexpressed faith. This doctrine, while serving only to keep people in perpetual blindness and ignorance, is also utterly useless in times of temptation — it only plunges the heart of the person into the pit of despair, since the person is incapable of receiving comfort for lack of knowledge and understanding of God's word and promises. Second: that every person ought to live in fear and doubt about the forgiveness of his sins, and that no one can be assured by the certainty of faith either of God's present favor or of his own salvation. It is true that, in regard to our own unworthiness and inadequacy, we have every reason not only to doubt and fear, but to despair and be ashamed before the judgment seat of God. Yet the idea that a person cannot be certainly resolved by faith in God's mercy through and for the merit of Christ is a comfortless doctrine for a distressed soul — and it is contrary to the saving word of the Gospel, which teaches that certainty flows from the nature of faith, not from doubting. Third: that every person is bound in conscience, on pain of damnation, to make special confession of all mortal sins with all their particular circumstances to his priest, once every year. This doctrine and practice, beyond having no warrant from Scripture or any basis in orthodox antiquity for eight hundred years or more after Christ, greatly disturbs the peace of conscience in times of crisis. It is impossible to understand or re-

member all one's sins — many are unknown and hidden — and when the mind is told that forgiveness depends on such an enumeration, it is thrown into doubt and distrust, and cannot rest by faith in the sole mercy of God, which is the only sovereign medicine for the soul. Moreover, the distress of the mind does not always arise from all the sins a person has committed, nor does God always set before the sinner's eyes every evil he has done — but rather some one or more particular sins. These are the ones that weigh heavily on the heart, and to be eased of them is work enough, even without presenting the confessor with a catalogue of all the rest. Fourth: that some sins are venial, because they are only beside the law of God and not against it, and because they subject the sinner only to temporal and not to eternal punishment. This conclusion is, first, false. Even if it be granted that some offenses are greater and some lesser, some in a higher degree and others in a lower — and again, that sins which are repented of, or which belong to a person who is in Christ and therefore accounted righteous, are pardonable because they are not imputed to condemnation — yet there is no sin of any degree that is not in itself, and by its own nature, mortal, whether we consider the nature of the sin or the measure and proportion of divine justice. By nature, sin is a departure from the perfect rule of righteousness, and is therefore subject to the curse of both temporal and eternal death. It is an offense against the highest majesty, and consequently, the person who commits it stands liable to everlasting punishment. Second, this is a weak and insufficient foundation for resolving a troubled conscience. True and saving joy is born of sorrow, and the heart of a person cannot be lifted up in assurance of God's favor — into the apprehension and experience of heavenly comforts — un-

less it is first humbled and brought to nothing in itself through true humiliation. The thought that the offense committed is venial may in some cases enlarge the heart too much and give occasion for presumption, when the situation actually calls for the opposite. And even where that is not the case, in a situation of falling through weakness after grace has been received, the mind that has been led astray by the erroneous idea that the sin is less serious than it really is — because it is venial — may in the end be less quieted, and more troubled. Fifth: that a person may satisfy the justice of God for the temporal punishment of his sins. Setting aside the falsehood of this position, I appeal to common experience to show how it actually affects the easing of the heart or the soothing of distress of mind in times of temptation. For when a person who is assured of the forgiveness of his sins still believes that something more remains to be done on his part, how can he in any likelihood rely entirely on Christ's satisfaction? How can he receive from it any assurance of reconciliation with God, whom he formerly offended? If we can and must do something on our own to appease the wrath of God, why has our Savior taught us, for the relief of our hearts, to rest wholly and only on the plea of pardon for our sins? It is true that Roman Catholic confessors teach their penitents, when they feel the wrath of God upon them for sin, to stop the mouth of conscience by performing a formal humiliation and repentance — in effect, to offer God certain ceremonial duties by way of satisfaction. But when sorrow seizes the soul and a person falls into temptation, it will become clear that these directions were insufficient. Despite them, a person may still lack true comfort in God's mercy and fall into despair without recovery. And for this very reason, experience has shown that even Roman Catholics

themselves, in the hour of death, have been willing to renounce their own works — indeed the entire system of human satisfactions — and to cling only to the mercy of God in Christ for their salvation.

From these examples, and many more that could be added, it is clear on how weak and unstable foundations the case-divinity of the Roman Catholic Church stands, and how indirect a course they take for resolving and directing the troubled conscience.

Given both the value and the misuse of this doctrine, we can see how necessary it is that in churches professing the Christian religion, it should be taught more fully and developed further than it currently is. To this end, it would be desirable for knowledgeable men in the ministry — those whom God's grace has equipped with the tongue of the learned — to devote their efforts in this direction: not only exploring the depths of speculative doctrinal questions, but also attaching to them the practical grounds and conclusions by which they might both inform the judgment and correct the conscience of their hearers. By this means, distressed souls would be relieved, piety and devotion would be more widely practiced, the kingdom of sin, Satan, and Antichrist would be weakened and diminished, and the kingdom of Christ Jesus would be more and more established in its place.

What the author and compiler of the following discourse has done toward this end is evident throughout his other writings, which he has left behind. These works openly display the great measure of knowledge and understanding, and the other gifts both natural and spiritual, with which God had enriched him — and they carry with them the sweet savor of piety and sanctification, by which he proved his heart to God and his life to others. In these

writings, he has also on occasion set forth and explained many notable rules for directing and resolving the conscience, as will be apparent to any careful and learned reader.

To say nothing of the rest: the present work itself is ample testimony of his knowledge and skill in this area, attained through great labor, much careful observation, and long experience. It is a work that commends itself to the church of God especially in two respects. First, because the principles and foundations from which he gives direction are drawn either directly, or by sound inference, from the written word — and are therefore more able to satisfy the doubting or distressed mind. Second, because it is set forth with such clarity and arranged in such order and method as best serves the understanding and memory of the reader.

I have taken the liberty of presenting this entire treatise of questions to your Worship, and of publishing it under your patronage and protection, as one to whom it rightly belongs. First, because God, who honors those who honor Him, has blessed you not only with civil authority and dignity in the commonwealth, but with the honorable name of a Friend to the church of God — something directly confirmed by your sincere love of the truth and your continued support for its teachers, the ministers and dispensers of the Gospel. Second, because just as the author of these cases was himself in many ways bound to you during his lifetime, so his wife and children have, for his sake, received much kindness from you since his death — a clear proof of the truth and sincerity of your affection toward him in the Lord. And finally, it was my desire, by publishing this work and the other two parts that will follow under your name, to give some expression of my duty to your Worship — trusting that as you loved the author, you will be pleased to patron-

ize the work and to interpret favorably both the labor and the good intentions of the publisher. And so, troubling you no further, I humbly take my leave, and commend your Worship to the grace and favor of God in Christ. From Emmanuel College in Cambridge. June 28, 1604.

Your Worship's in all dutiful service, Thomas Pickering.

TEXT



Isaiah 50:4 — The Lord God has given me a tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to the weary.

In the portion of the prophecy that comes before this verse, the Holy Spirit sets forth and foretells the calling of the Gentiles, which was to begin at Christ's death and continue from that point to this day, and so on to the end of the world. In the earlier verses of this chapter, mention is made of the rejection of the Jews — not a general rejection, but a particular one, namely during the affliction they endured in the days of Isaiah. Now in this passage, as in all other prophecies of this kind that deal with this subject, Christ Himself is introduced speaking in His own person. The words of this chapter from the beginning to the present verse and those that follow are the words of Christ the Mediator.

In the preceding verses, He argues the case of their rejection. The heart of the whole argument is this: either He or they themselves were the cause of it — but He was not the cause, and therefore they themselves were, through their sins. The reasoning by which He proves they were the cause runs like this. You Jews cannot produce any written bill of divorce to show that I rejected you.

Therefore I appeal to your own consciences: have you not brought this judgment upon yourselves by your own iniquities? (verse 1). On the other side, the reason God was not the cause is this: because He for His part called them in great mercy and love, but when He called they would not obey (verse 2).

Now at the end of the second verse is contained an answer to a secret objection that some stubborn Jew might raise in this way: God does not now have the same power to save and deliver us as He had in former times. We cannot therefore hope or expect any deliverance from Him — so what are we to do in the meantime? To this the Lord Himself answers in verses 2, 3, and 4: that His hand is not shortened, nor His power diminished even for greater works, much less for their deliverance. And though the present affliction they were enduring was great and prolonged, they should not be overly dismayed, but rather should be comforted. For God had given Him the tongue of the learned, to speak a word in season to the weary and distressed, and consequently He had power to ease and refresh their weariness and affliction.

In this text, then, one principal duty of Christ's prophetic office is set forth, by way of analogy to the practices of the prophets in the Old Testament — especially those belonging to the schools of Elijah and Elisha, who are here called the learned. From its words, one special point of instruction may be gathered: that there is a certain knowledge or doctrine revealed in the word of God, by which the consciences of the weak may be corrected and quieted. I draw this conclusion as follows. It was one special duty of Christ's prophetic office to give comfort to the consciences of those who were distressed, as the prophet records here. Now just as Christ had the power to perform such a duty, so He has entrusted the dis-

pensing of it to the ministers of the Gospel. We should not think that Christ in His own person ministered and spoke words of comfort to the weary in the times of the prophets, because He had not yet appeared in our nature. Yet He did speak — but how? Through the persons of the prophets. Similarly, because Christ in the New Testament does not speak to the afflicted in His own visible person, it follows that He performs this great work through the ministry of pastors and teachers on earth, to whom He has given knowledge and other gifts for this very purpose. There must therefore be a certain and reliable doctrine, set forth and taught in the Scriptures, by which the consciences of distressed people may be quieted and relieved. And this doctrine is not obtained through extraordinary revelation, but must be drawn from the written word of God.

The question to be addressed, then, is: what is this doctrine? It is not a simple or readily accessible matter, but one full of labor and difficulty — indeed vast, like the open sea. I will only walk along its shores, as it were, and set forth the main heads of the doctrine, so that I may at least prompt others to consider and develop it more fully.

In order to proceed with some structure, I will first lay down certain foundations or preambles that may give light and direction to what follows. After that, I will set forth and answer the main and principal questions of conscience.

The foundations or preambles are four in particular. The first concerns confession. The second concerns the degrees of goodness in things and actions. The third concerns the degrees of sin. The fourth and last concerns the subjection and power of conscience. I will address each of these in order.

The first foundation is that in troubles of conscience, it is fitting and appropriate for private confession always to be used. For James says, Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another — indicating that confession in such cases is to be used as something most necessary. It stands to reason that a physician must first know the disease before he can apply the remedy. The grief of the heart will not be discerned unless it is revealed through the confession of the one suffering. For this same reason, in the distress of conscience, the scruple — that is, the thing troubling the conscience — must be made known. Nevertheless, in private confession, certain cautions must be observed. First, private confession must not be urged as something simply or absolutely necessary, without which there can be no salvation. Also, it is not appropriate for confession to cover all sins, but only the scruple itself — that is, only those sin or sins that are actually troubling and distressing the conscience. Third, while confession may be made to any person — Confess to one another, says James — it is especially to be made to the prophets and ministers of the Gospel. For they, by virtue of their office and gifts, are in all likelihood the most fit and able of all people to instruct, correct, comfort, and guide the weak and wounded conscience. Finally, the person to whom confession is made must be someone trustworthy and faithful — one who is able and willing to keep what is revealed confidential, and to bury it, as it were, in the grave of forgetfulness. For love covers a multitude of sins.

The second foundation concerns the degrees of goodness in human things and actions. Goodness in things is of two kinds: uncreated and created. Uncreated goodness is God Himself, who never had a beginning and who is goodness itself, because His na-

ture is absolutely and perfectly good and because He is the author and source of all goodness in created things. Created goodness is that by which the creature is made good. It is nothing other than the fruit of the goodness that is essentially in God. The degrees of created goodness are these. There is a general or natural goodness in creatures, and a more special or moral goodness.

General goodness is that by which all creatures are accepted and approved by God, who both created and ordained them. Thus every creature is good — partly by creation, and partly by ordination. By creation, the substance of each creature — the sun, the moon, the earth, water, food, drink, and the like — is good, having its being from God. For the same reason, the essential properties, quantities, qualities, motions, actions, and inclinations of creatures, considered in themselves together with all their effects, are good. By this same general goodness, even the devil himself and his actions, insofar as he is a substance and they are actions having their being from God, are good. Things also take on the quality of goodness not only by creation, but also by God's ordination, whereby they are directed and appointed to certain uses and ends. Thus an evil conscience, hell, and death are good, because they are ordained by God for the execution of His justice — even though in themselves and to us they are evil.

Beyond this general and natural goodness, there is also a special or moral goodness properly so called. It is that which is agreeable to the eternal and unchangeable wisdom of God, revealed in the moral law, where it is commanded. Things that are commanded by God to be done are morally good. Now of actions that are morally good, there are two degrees. They are either good in themselves alone, or good both in themselves and in the person

doing them. Some things are morally good in themselves only. For example, when a wicked person gives alms, it is a good work in itself — but not good in the doer, because it is not done in faith and from a good conscience. In the same way, all the virtues of people who do not know God are morally good in themselves, but they are not good in those people. In them, such virtues are nothing but beautiful sins. The next degree of goodness is when things and actions are both good in themselves and good in the person who does them. The prayers and alms of Cornelius were of this sort — good in themselves and good in him also, because he was a believer.

Now opposite to things and actions that are morally good or evil are actions and things of a middle nature, commonly called indifferent. In themselves they are neither good nor evil and may be done or left undone without sin — in themselves, I say, for in their circumstances they can be and may be made either evil or good. Here we must remember to distinguish between what is convenient and what is inconvenient, which arises from the nature of indifferent things. Convenience is when a thing or action is so suited to its circumstances, and the circumstances so suited to it, that it becomes fitting. Inconvenience, on the other hand, is when a thing or action is done in unsuitable circumstances that bring some harm or loss to the outward person, or that fail to meet the standard of decency — and therefore make it unfitting. By what has been said, we may discern when an action is good, evil, indifferent, convenient, or inconvenient.

The third foundation concerns the degrees or distinctions of sin. Here we must first inquire what sin properly is, and what properly makes a person a sinner. Sin in its proper nature, as John says, is a violation of the law — that is, a lack of conformity to the

law of God. For a better understanding of this, we must know that in Adam before his fall there were three things that could not be separated from one another: the substance of his body and soul; the faculties and powers of his body and soul; and the image of God, consisting in a straightness and conformity of all the affections and powers of the person to God's will. Now when Adam fell and sinned against God, what was his sin? Not the loss of the first two — for both remained — but the very loss and absence of the third thing, namely, conformity to God's will. I make this plain by this comparison. In a musical instrument, we consider not only the instrument itself and the sound it produces, but also the harmony in the sound. Now the opposite of harmony, or the disorder in music, is neither the first nor the second of these, but the third — namely, discord, which is the want or absence of harmony, what we call disharmony. In the same way, Adam's sin is not the absence of either the substance or the faculties of soul and body, but the want of the third thing named before — conformity, or correspondence to the will of God in regard to obedience. But someone may say: the lack of conformity in the powers of the soul is not properly sin, because sin requires not only an absence of goodness but a habit or presence of evil. I answer that this very lack of conformity is not only an absence of goodness, but also the habit or presence of evil. For as this lack enters in and is received into human nature, it is properly a want or absence of goodness. But once received into the nature of a person, it continues and abides in the powers and faculties thereof — and in that way takes on the character of a habit.

It may be objected again that lust and concupiscence — that is, original sin — draws the heart away from the service of God and entices it to evil. Now to entice or draw away is an action, and this action cannot proceed from a mere privation or absence. In answer, we must consider sin in two ways: first, together with the thing or subject in which it resides; and second, by itself in its own nature. If we consider sin together with its subject, it is an evil inclination or action. But if we consider it in its own nature, it is not an inclination or action but a lack. For example, in a murder we must consider two things. One is the action of moving the body, of raising the weapon, and so on — which is not properly sin when considered simply as an action, because every action comes from God, who is the first cause of all things and actions. Again, in a murder there is a second thing: the killing or slaying of the person, which is the disorder or deviation in the action — the fact that the action is directed to a wrong use and end. In this respect the action is sin, namely because it lacks conformity to the will of God. The nature of sin, then, lies not in the action itself but in the manner in which the action is done. Sin properly is nothing that formally exists or subsists on its own — for if it did, God would be its author, since He is the creator and ordainer of every thing and action. Rather, sin is a disorder, or an absence of goodness and uprightness, in the thing that does subsist. It is therefore rightly and truly said in the schools: In sin there is nothing positive — it is only the want of what ought to be, or to subsist, partly in the nature of the person and partly in the actions that flow from that nature. So now we see what sin is.

The second thing to be considered is: what properly makes a person a sinner? To understand this, we must consider four things present in every sin: first, the fault by which God is offended; second, the guilt that binds the conscience over to punishment; and third, the punishment itself, which is eternal death. Of these three, it is not the guilt or the punishment but the fault or offense that makes a person a sinner. But here is a further difficulty. When a person has committed some offense — and that offense was done and past, perhaps twenty or thirty years ago — the person who committed it does not thereby cease to be a sinner. I ask, then: what is the very thing for which a person is still called and reckoned a sinner in the present, when the offense itself is past? The answer is that every actual sin, beyond the three things already mentioned, must be considered alongside a fourth: a certain stain or blot that it imprints and leaves upon the offender as its fruit. This is an inclination or evil disposition of the heart, by which it becomes more prone to the offense committed, or to any other sin. For just as the person with dropsy, the more he drinks, the thirstier he is and the more he desires to drink — so a sinner, the more he sins, the more prone he is to sin and the more he desires to continue in wickedness. And just as a person who looks at the sun, if he turns his face away, remains turned until he turns back again — so the one who turns from God through sin makes himself a sinner and remains so until he turns back again through repentance. Thus David was a sinner not only in the very act of his adultery and murder. Even after those acts were done and past, he remained a murderer and an adulterer, because a new — or rather renewed — proneness to these and all other sins took hold in his heart through his fall, and gained strength, until he turned to God

through repentance upon the rebuke of the prophet. The thing, then, that makes a sinner a sinner is the fault together with its fruit — namely, the stain imprinted on the soul each time a person actually offends.

The practical use of this doctrine about sin is twofold. First, from it we learn and see what original sin is — the sin by which an infant in its very conception and birth is already a sinner. Every infant must be seen as a part of Adam, proceeding from him and sharing in his nature. Through this, each child is made a sinner not only by the imputation of Adam's offense but also by the propagation of a proneness and inclination to every evil, received together with human nature from Adam. This is how we ought to understand original sin: not as merely the corruption of nature alone, but as Adam's first offense imputed, along with its fruit — the corruption of nature — which is an inclination to every evil, passed down together with our nature from our first parents. Second, from this we are taught to guard against every sin, whether in thought, word, or deed. For even though the act of sinning passes away in the doing, it breeds and increases a wicked disposition in the heart — as has been said — toward the offense committed or any other sin. People deceive themselves who think that all the evil of sin lies only in the act of sinning and goes no further. In truth, every offense carries with it a certain stain that corrupts the heart and causes a person to delight in and persist in their offense. This persistence in sin is a greater cause of damnation than the sin itself. This should warn us to take care that we do not linger in any sin. And if it happens that through weakness we are overtaken by some temptation, we must labor to rise again and turn from our sin to God through new and speedy repentance.

That is enough regarding sin itself. Now follow the distinctions of sin, which are many. The first set of distinctions is drawn from the causes and origins of sin in a person, which are three: reason, will, and affection.

The distinctions of sin in regard to reason are these. First, some sins are sins of knowledge, and some are sins of ignorance. A sin of knowledge is when a person offends against his own understanding — doing evil knowing it to be evil. This is greater than a sin of ignorance, for the one who knows his master's will and does not do it will be beaten with many stripes. A sin of ignorance is when a person does evil without knowing it to be evil. Paul was a blasphemer, an oppressor, and a persecutor of the church of Christ in this way — acting out of ignorance and blind zeal, not knowing what he was doing was evil. By ignorance here I mean an ignorance of things that ought to be known, and this is of two kinds: simple, or willful. Simple ignorance is when a person, even after diligent effort and earnest study, still remains ignorant. This ignorance will not excuse anyone if it concerns things they are bound to know. For it is said: the one who does not do his master's will, because he did not know it, will still be beaten with stripes — though fewer.

In this regard, even the pagans who did not know God are without excuse, because they were bound to have known Him. Adam had the perfect knowledge of God imprinted in his nature and lost it through his own fault, both for himself and his posterity. And it is God's commandment — one to which every person is bound to render obedience — that a person should know God, that is, His will and word. But someone may ask: how can anyone be saved, seeing that every person is ignorant of many things they

ought to know? Answer: if we know the foundations of religion and are careful to obey God according to our knowledge — having at the same time a concern and desire to grow in the knowledge of God and His will — God will hold us excused. For our desire and effort to obey is accepted in place of obedience itself. The greater the simple ignorance is, the lesser the sin. This is why Peter diminishes and in some sense excuses the sin of the Jews in crucifying Christ, because they did it through ignorance — and Paul likewise excuses his sin in persecuting the church, pleading that it was done ignorantly in unbelief. Yet however such means may lessen this sin, it remains a sin worthy of condemnation. Willful ignorance is when a person takes delight in his ignorance and deliberately chooses to remain ignorant — not using, but despising the means by which he might gain and grow in knowledge. This is done carelessly and negligently, because the person does not want to leave the sin he loves or forsake the evil way of life in which he takes pleasure. This is the sin of those of whom Job speaks, who say to God, Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. And of whom David complains: that they flatter themselves in their own eyes and have stopped understanding and doing good. This ignorance is damnable and devilish. It excuses no one, but rather aggravates and increases sin. It is indeed the mother of many serious wickednesses.

Again, ignorance is of two kinds: ignorance of the law, or ignorance of what the law requires. Ignorance of the law is when a person does not know the written law of God nor the law of nature. This ignorance may somewhat lessen the sin, but it excuses no one — because it is a natural obligation and every person is bound to know the law. Ignorance of what the law requires is ignorance of

fact. And this is either with the fault of the person who does it, or without fault. Faulty ignorance is when a person is ignorant of a fact that he could have prevented. For example, when a drunk person kills another, not knowing what he is doing — and also not knowing he has done wrong. Yet because he could have prevented his drunkenness, he is at fault and has sinned. Faultless ignorance is when a thing is done that could not have been either known or avoided beforehand. For example, if a man is trimming a tree and the axe head flies off the handle and kills someone passing by — this is indeed manslaughter, but not intentional murder. It could not have been avoided and did not happen through his fault. This kind of ignorance is excusable.

The second source of sin is the will, from which arise three distinctions: some sins come directly from the will, some are beside the will, and some are mixed — partly from the will and partly against it. Sins proceeding from the will are properly called voluntary. These are sins that a person commits, moved by his own will, though knowing them to be evil. Here, the freer the will is, the greater the sin — for will added to knowledge makes the sin greater. Under voluntary sins are included all those that proceed from stirred affections — such as when a person tells a lie out of fear, or strikes another in anger. The reason is that these offenses, though not committed with deliberation but arising from the force of emotion, still do not exclude consent. We may also include here sins committed under compulsion, such as when a person is forced to deny his religion. His offense is in truth voluntary — though some think otherwise, regarding it as a mixed action. For compulsion does not reach the will, but only the outward person, and serves only to draw out consent. When consent is yielded, the per-

son denies his religion voluntarily, for the will cannot be coerced. Next, sins beside the will are those that are neither directly from the will nor against it. Of this sort are the first sudden motions to sin, conceived in the heart with some inward pleasure and delight. These are truly sins, though relatively small ones, condemned in the tenth commandment. They are not from the will, because they arise without and before consent. Yet neither are they against the will, because otherwise the heart would take no delight in them. Here, as a side note, we must observe — against the doctrine of the Roman Catholics — that not all sins are voluntary. For whatever lacks conformity to the law of God is sin, whether it involves the consent of the will or not. Many desires and delights arise suddenly in the human heart that are not in accordance with God's law and have no consent or approval of the will. Similarly, when one person kills another while thinking he is killing a wild animal, and afterward remembers what he has done and is not grieved by it — in this case he has sinned, because his lack of grief is offensive to God, even though the act itself was entirely beside his will.

Mixed sins are partly from the will and partly against it. Of this sort are the works of the regenerate person, which are done partly with his will and partly against his will, being partly good and partly evil. The reason for this is as follows. After regeneration there are in a person two contrary foundations or sources of action: natural corruption, which is the inclination of the mind, will, and affections toward what is against the law — called the flesh; and a created quality of holiness, worked in those same faculties by the Holy Spirit — called the Spirit. These two are not separate from each other, but joined and mingled together in all the faculties and powers of the soul. Between these two there is a continual battle —

corruption fighting against grace, and grace against corruption. Because there are always contrary inclinations present in one and the same will, contrary actions must necessarily flow from the regenerate person. In every action, the flesh wills what is evil, and the Spirit on the other side wills what is good. Paul acknowledged this from his own experience after his conversion when he said, To will is present with me, but I find no means perfectly to do that which is good (Romans 7:18). Again, I delight in the law of God concerning the inner man, but I see another law in my members, rebelling against the law of my mind, and leading me captive to the law of sin, which is in my members (Romans 7:22-23).

The third source or fountain of sin in a person is affection, from which proceed two kinds: sins of infirmity, and sins of presumption. Sins of infirmity are those that proceed from the sudden passions of the mind and the strong affections of the heart — such as hatred, grief, anger, sorrow, and the like. These sins are commonly thought to be found in all people, but the truth is that they are properly characteristic of the regenerate. For infirmity cannot properly be said to exist in those in whom sin has strength and firmness, and in whom there is no power of grace at all. Moreover, the regenerate person does not sin whenever he would, because the grace of God in him restrains him. Nor does he sin in whatever way he would — partly because he does not sin with his whole heart, since the strength of the flesh is restrained by the Spirit; and partly because, having fallen, he does not lie still but recovers himself through speedy repentance. This is clear evidence that the sins he falls into are not presumptuous but arise ordinarily from weakness and infirmity. Sins of presumption are those that proceed from pride, arrogance, willfulness, and a haughty heart. Against

these David prays: Let not presumptuous sins have dominion over me (Psalm 19:13). Of these there are three degrees. The first is when a person willfully persists in his sins on the mistaken assumption of God's mercy and his own future repentance. This is the sin of most people. The second is when a person sins willfully in contempt of the law of God. This is what Moses calls sinning with a high hand, and the punishment for it was to be cut off from among the people by immediate death (Numbers 15:30). The third is when a person sins not only willfully and contemptuously, but out of deliberate malice and spite against God Himself and Christ Jesus. From this we may understand what the sin against the Holy Spirit is. It is not every sin of presumption, or every sin against knowledge and conscience. Rather, it is a particular kind of presumptuous offense in which true religion is renounced — and that with deliberate purpose and resolved malice against the very majesty of God Himself and Christ (Hebrews 10:29).

Now follow other distinctions of sin with respect to its object, which is the law. In respect of the law, sin is of two kinds: sins of commission, or sins of omission. I say in respect of the law, because God has revealed in His law two kinds of precepts: one in which some good thing is commanded to be done — such as to love God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves; and another in which some evil is forbidden — such as the making of a graven image, the taking of God's name in vain, and so on. A sin of commission is when a person does something flatly forbidden in the law and word of God — for example, when one person kills another contrary to the law, which says, You shall not kill. A sin of omission is when a person leaves undone some duty that the law requires — for example, failing to preserve his neighbor's life or well-

being when it is in his power to do so. These too are truly sins, and by them, just as by sins of commission, people will be judged on the last day. Sins of omission have three degrees. First, when a person does nothing at all and omits the commanded duty entirely — as when, having opportunity and ability, he does not so much as lift a finger to save his neighbor's life. Second, when a person performs the duty commanded, but fails in both the manner and the measure of it. This is how people who do not know God fail in their good works. For the things they did were, in their substance and matter, good and commendable — done for civil and honest reasons, with a view to the common good. Yet in truth their actions were no better than sins of omission, because they flowed from corrupted hearts void of faith and were not directed toward the primary end and aim of all human actions: the honor and glory of God. Third, when a person does things in the right manner, but falls short in the measure. This is how God's children sin in all their obedience to the law. They do the good things the law commands — such as loving God and neighbor — but they cannot attain to the full measure of love that the law requires. In this way, even the best people alive sin in every good work they do, so that if God were to enter into judgment, deal with them in the strictness of His justice, and examine them by the rigorous rule of the law, He could justly condemn them even for their best actions. For this reason, when we pray daily for the forgiveness of our sins, even our best works must be included in that prayer — because we fall short, if not in substance and manner, then at least in the measure of goodness that ought to characterize what we do. We must also take care to repent of our sins of omission just as we do of sins of commission, because by leaving our duty undone we offend more

often than by sins committed. And the smallest omission is enough to condemn us, if God should hold us strictly to account for it (Matthew 25:42-43).

The next distinction of sins may be this. Some are crying sins, and some are sins of toleration. By crying sins I mean those that are so heinous and so grievous in their kind that they hasten God's judgments and call down swift vengeance on the sinner. There are several examples of this in Scripture, and especially four. First, Cain's sin in murdering his innocent brother Abel, of which it was said, The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground. The next is the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, which was pride, fullness of bread, abundance of idleness, merciless treatment of the poor, and all manner of uncleanness (Ezekiel 16). Of this, the Lord said that the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah was great and their sins exceeding grievous. The third is the sin of oppression suffered by the Israelites in Egypt at the hands of Pharaoh and his taskmasters. The fourth is merciless injustice in wrongfully withholding and keeping back a laborer's wages. These are called crying sins for the following reasons. First, because they have now reached their full measure and height, beyond which God will not allow them to pass without due punishment. Moreover, the Lord takes greater notice of them and inquires more deeply into them than into other sins, because they exceed and are most conspicuous wherever they are committed. Third, they call for immediate help for the afflicted and wronged, and consequently for swift execution of vengeance upon those who commit them. And lastly, because God is accustomed to hear the cries of those who endure

such heavy treatment at the hands of others, and accordingly to help them and to repay the perpetrators with the punishment they deserve.

Next to these are sins of toleration — lesser than the former. Though they deserve death in themselves, God in His mercy shows patience and forbearance toward those who commit them, either deferring the temporal punishment or pardoning both temporal and eternal punishment for His elect. Such was the ignorance of the Gentiles before Christ's coming, which God deferred to punish and, as we might say, overlooked. More specifically, there are three kinds of sins of toleration. The first is original sin, or concupiscence, in the regenerate after regeneration. It is not entirely abolished at conversion, but remains, troubling and tempting us to a greater or lesser degree until death. Yet if we carry a constant purpose not to sin and make an effort to resist all temptations, this concupiscence of ours will not be imputed to us, nor will we be condemned for it. To this end the holy apostle says, There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Yet he does not say there is nothing in them worthy of condemnation. For original sin remains until death, truly deserving damnation, even though it is not imputed. The second kind of sins of toleration is unknown and hidden sins in the regenerate. For who can tell how often he offends? says David. When a person who is a child of God examines his heart and humbles himself even for all his particular sins that he knows about himself, there will still remain some unknown sins for which he cannot have a particular repentance. And yet these are not imputed but pardoned when there is repentance for known sins. For example, David repented of his murder and adultery, yet afterward — mistakenly, due to the corruption of the times — he

lived until his death in the sin of polygamy, without any particular repentance that we know of. The patriarchs acted similarly and are not entirely excusable. Yet they were not condemned for it. Nor were they saved without repentance for this sin — but God in mercy accepted a general repentance for it. The same is the case for all the elect in regard to their secret and hidden faults. For unless God were willing to accept general repentance for unknown sins, few or none at all would be saved. And here the endless mercy of God is remarkably displayed, that He graciously accepts our repentance when we repent, even if not with the particularity that we ought. Nevertheless, this must not encourage or embolden anyone to live in his sins without turning to God. For unless we repent particularly for all the sins we know, not only our known offenses but even our secret sins will condemn us. Many sins are committed by people that are afterward completely forgotten. Others are committed and afterward remain uncertain as to whether they are sins at all. And in doing the best duties we can, we often offend without even noticing it. All of these, in the case of the regenerate, are through God's mercy sins of toleration in regard to particular repentance. The third kind of sins of toleration involves certain particular acts of people that are reprov'd in Scripture yet never punished. Such was the act of Zipporah, who circumcised her child in her husband's presence when he was able to do it himself and she had no calling to do what she did. Although God's hand was against Moses, he was not sick at the time — as some would explain the matter. There is nothing in the text to suggest this. It is more likely that she circumcised her son in haste, to get ahead of her husband. The deed was done with some indignation, and she threw the foreskin at his feet. Yet because this act was in some

sense an act of obedience — since the thing God required was done, even if not in the manner He required — God accepted it and stayed His hand from killing Moses. In the same way, God accepted Ahab's humility, even though it was hypocritical, because it was a show of obedience. For that reason He deferred a temporal punishment until the days of Ahab's descendants. God sent lions to destroy the Assyrians living in Samaria for their idolatry. Yet as soon as they had learned to fear the Lord after the manner of the God of Israel — though they mixed this with their own idolatry — God, for that partial obedience, allowed them to live in peace.

The sixth distinction of sins may be this. Some sins are against God, and some are against other people. This distinction is grounded in a passage from Samuel: If one person sins against another, the judge shall judge it; but if a person sins against the Lord, who shall plead for him? Sins against God are those that are directly and immediately committed against the majesty of God. Such are atheism, idolatry, blasphemy, perjury, profaning the Sabbath, and all the violations of the first table. Sins against others are injuries, hurts, losses, and damages by which our neighbor is unjustly harmed or hindered by us — in his dignity, life, chastity, wealth, good name, or in any other way. Such actions must be considered in two ways. First, as injuries and hurts done to our neighbor. Second, as violations of God's law, which forbids us to act in such ways. In this second respect they are called sins, because sin is properly against God. Therefore, when we speak of sins against others, we mean injuries, losses, or damages done to them. In this sense must that passage in Matthew be understood: If your brother sins against you, etc.

The seventh distinction of sins is noted by Paul, where he says: Every sin that a person commits is outside the body, but the one who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. In this passage, sins are distinguished into those that are outside the body and those that are against a person's own body. Sins outside the body are those in which the body is the instrument of the sin, but not the thing being abused. Such are murder, theft, and drunkenness. In committing these sins, the body is only a helper — only a remote, instrumental cause — and the thing being abused is something outside the body. For example: in drunkenness, the thing being abused is wine or strong drink. In theft, it is another person's goods. In murder, it is the instrument by which the act is carried out. The body contributes its help to these things, but the injury is directed toward God's creatures — toward the body and goods of our neighbor. And all sins are like this, with the single exception of adultery. Sins against the body are those in which the body is not only the instrument but the very thing being abused. Adultery alone — and those acts of the same kind — is properly a sin against the body, for two reasons. First, the body of the sinner is both a contributing cause of the sin and the thing he is misusing against his own self. Second, through this offense he does not merely hinder but altogether forfeits his right, power, and ownership of his own body, by making it the member of a prostitute. And finally, while other sins in their own way bring shame and dishonor upon the body, none of them strikes as deep or leaves a stain as deeply imprinted in it as the sin of sexual immorality.

The eighth distinction of sins is grounded in Paul's charge to Timothy: Do not share in other people's sins. Sins are either other people's sins, or participation in other people's sins. This distinc-

tion is worth knowing and remembering because it helps to either diminish or aggravate the sins committed. Participation in sin occurs in several ways. First, by counsel: this is how Caiaphas sinned when he advised that Christ be put to death. Second, by command: this is how David sinned in the murder of Uriah. Third, by consent or assistance (Romans 1:31). This is how Saul sinned by holding the garments of those who stoned Stephen. (Acts 22:20). Fourth, by provocation: this is how those sin who incite others to sin, as Paul speaks of when he says fathers must not provoke their children to wrath. (Ephesians 6:4). Fifth, by negligence, when people are called to rebuke sin and do not. Sixth, by flattery, when people encourage others in their sin. Seventh, by winking at sins or passing them over with only a token rebuke (Ephesians 5:11). This is how Eli sinned by rebuking his sons too leniently, bringing a temporal judgment on himself and his family (1 Samuel 2 and 4). Eighth, by participation (Ephesians 5:7) — this is how those sin who receive stolen goods. Ninth, by defending another person in his sin: for the one who justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous is an abomination to the Lord.

The ninth distinction follows. Some people's sins (says Paul) are evident beforehand; the sins of others appear only later. Some interpret this to mean: some people's sins are kept secret until the last judgment, while some are revealed in this life before that day. I believe this is true, but it is not the meaning of the text. In verse 23, the apostle was speaking about ordination, charging Timothy not to hastily admit anyone into church office, lest he share in their sins. In verse 24, he gives a reason for this: Some people's sins are evident beforehand — that is, some people's faults and deficiencies are known before their ordination to church office, and the church

can form a clear judgment about such persons. But others appear only afterward — that is, they are not revealed until after ordination. This is how Judas's wickedness did not show itself at first, but was revealed after he was called to be an apostle.

And so we see what the distinctions of sins are. Concerning all of them, this must be held and remembered as a foundation: every sin, in whatever degree, is mortal in itself, and no sin is venial by its own nature. For the wages of every sin is death. (Romans 6:23). And, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things that are written in the book of the law, to do them. (Galatians 3:10).

This foundation must be held against the Church of Rome, which in her case-divinity is accustomed to quieting the conscience by teaching people that various sins are venial. And though every sin is mortal in itself, not all are equally mortal — some are more so, some less — because sin has various degrees, as has been shown in part.

Again, the same sin may be increased or lessened — and thus made more or less heinous — in several ways. First, by circumstances, which are principally seven. The first is the person who sins. The sin of a public figure is more heinous — indeed more mortal — than the sin of a private person, because he holds a prominent position and his actions are more visible and scandalizing than those of ordinary people. The servant who knows his master's will and does not do it is the greater sinner and will suffer greater punishment than the one who neglects it through simple ignorance. (Matthew 10:15). The minister and dispenser of the word, if he is faithless and unfruitful, bears a far greater offense and consequently a far greater punishment than other people. (Matthew 5:13). The second is the person who is offended. The

Jews sinned more heinously in crucifying Christ, the Son of God, the Lord of glory, than their fathers did in persecuting and killing the prophets. The injury done to those whom God tenderly loves is far more displeasing to Him than if it were done to others. The one who touches you, says the prophet — meaning the Jews, His chosen and beloved people — touches the apple of His eye. (Zechariah 2:8). The person who schemes against his harmless brother who dwells peaceably beside him commits a sin most odious to God and man. (Proverbs 3:29; Psalm 7:4). The one who is called and converted to God and Christ, and does not make honest provision for his own household, is so notorious an offender that Paul regards him as a denier of the faith and worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8). The person who rails against the judge or speaks evil of the ruler of his people is a greater transgressor of God's commandment than one who abuses an ordinary person. (Exodus 22:28). The third is the thing done in which the offense is committed. To falsify the word of God and to profane His worship and service is far more abominable in His sight than falsifying the word of a person or abusing human laws and ordinances. Harming or endangering the person and life of our neighbor is a more odious offense than diminishing his goods and outward estate. And harm done by our fault to his soul is worse in every way than wrong done to his body. The fourth is the place where the sin is committed. According to this circumstance, if a person speaks or does anything that comes under the name of a violation of piety or justice in a public setting — in the congregation, in open court, or in a general assembly — and that with public and widespread scandal, he is a greater offender than if he had spoken or done the same thing at home, in his house or private room. The fifth is the end. For this

reason, the person who steals from another to satisfy his hunger and save his life when driven to extreme necessity offends in a lower and lesser degree than the thief who robs by the highway for the purpose of enriching himself at the expense of others. The sixth is the manner. The person who commits sexual immorality in the outward act sins more grievously and with greater scandal than if he had only entertained an impure thought in his heart. And the person who sins with deliberate purpose and presumption, or with obstinate and resolved malice against God, has proceeded to a higher degree of wickedness than if he had fallen through ignorance, weakness, or disordered and undisciplined emotion. Similarly, the sin of the Jews in forcing Pilate — through threatening language such as accusing him of being an enemy of Caesar — to unjustly condemn Christ Jesus was in a higher degree than the sin of Pilate himself, who yielded to their pressure and pronounced sentence against Him (John 19:11). The last is the time, which also serves to aggravate sin. For ordinary disobedience in a time of grace and willful neglect of God's calling in the abundance of means is far more damnable than committing sin in days of ignorance and blindness, when such means are lacking.

From this doctrine of how sin is increased and lessened in these respects, we may gather that all sins are not equal, as the ancient Stoics and their followers have falsely imagined. For it has been demonstrated at length through numerous examples that there are degrees of sin — some lesser, some greater; some more offensive and odious to God and others, some less. And the circumstances of time, place, person, and manner of doing serve to enlarge or diminish the sin committed.

If it is objected here that sin is nothing but the doing of what is unlawful, and that this is equal in all who sin, and therefore offenses are equal — I answer that in every sin, people must consider not only its unlawfulness but the reason why it is unlawful. And that reason is properly because it is a violation of God's law, contrary to His will as revealed in His word. Now no violation of God's law is equally contrary to the will of the lawgiver. And many transgressions are more contrary to His will than fewer. For the more sin increases, the more God's wrath is kindled against the sinner in proportion to what he deserves. If it is said again that the nature of sin consists only in making a departure from the appointed standard — in passing the boundaries of duty prescribed by God — and that all are equal in this respect: the answer is that it is false to say that the one who makes a smaller departure from the commanded duty is equal in offense to one who makes a greater departure. For the same sin in substance has various steps and degrees, by which one person becomes a more heinous offender than another. For example: in the seventh commandment, where God forbids adultery, He forbids three degrees of the same sin — namely, adultery of the heart, consisting of inordinate and impure affections; adultery of the tongue, in corrupt, dishonest, and indecent speech; and the very act of sexual immorality committed by the body. Now it cannot be said that the person who breaks this commandment only in the first degree is as great a transgressor as the one who has proceeded to the second, and then to the third. Therefore it remains an undoubted truth that sins committed against the law of God are not equal, but some are lesser and some are greater.

The second way that sin is aggravated is by the adding of sin upon sin. This happens in several ways: first, by committing one sin on the heels of another — as David sinned by adding murder to adultery. Second, by doubling and multiplying sin — that is, by falling repeatedly into the same sin. Third, by lying in sin without repentance. Here it must be remembered that people of mature years living in the church are not simply condemned for their particular sins, but for their continuance and residence in them. Sins committed make people worthy of damnation, but living and abiding in them without repentance is what actually brings damnation. Just as in the church on earth, people are excommunicated not so much for their offense as for their obstinacy — so it will be in the church triumphant. The kingdom of heaven will be barred against people not so much for the sin committed as for their lying in it without repentance. This is how God deals with those who have lived within the precincts of the church: they will be condemned for the very absence of true faith and repentance. This should warn each of us to take care that we do not lie in any sin. And if we are in any way overtaken, we should repent speedily, lest we aggravate our sin by continuing in it and thereby bring swift damnation upon ourselves.

Third, the same sin is made greater or lesser in four ways according to the stages in committing it, as noted by James: temptation, conception, birth, and perfection (James 1:15). Actual sin in the first degree — temptation — is when the mind, upon some sudden impulse, is drawn to think evil and at the same time experiences some delight in it. For an evil impulse cast into the mind by the flesh and the devil is like bait cast into the water, which allures and pleases the fish and causes it to bite. Sin in conception is

when, together with the delight of the mind, consent of the will is given to commit the evil that was thought on. Sin in birth is when it comes forth into action or execution. Sin in perfection is when a person has grown into a custom and habit of sin through long practice. For the repeated committing of one and the same sin leaves an evil impression in the heart — a strong and violent inclination toward that sin or any other evil, as has already been taught. Sin thus brought to full maturity brings forth death: for a habit of sinning produces hardness of heart, hardness of heart produces impenitence, and impenitence produces condemnation. Of these degrees, the first is the least and the last is the greatest. The same sin is lesser in temptation than in conception, lesser in conception than in birth, and greatest in perfection — worse than all the former stages combined.

There are also various other distinctions of sin — for example, that the chief sins of the first table are greater than the chief sins of the second table. Yet the chief sins of the second table are greater than violations of ceremonial duties under the first table. But what has been said is sufficient for our purposes.

The practical use of this doctrine is extensive. First, from it we learn what the human heart is by nature: a corrupt and unclean fountain, from which flows throughout this life an endless stream of corruptions — infinite in number, harmful in quality, heinous in degree, and dangerous in effect (Matthew 15:19). From it flow all the distinctions of sin named above, with their various branches, and countless more that cannot be rehearsed. This should move us humbly to seek God and earnestly ask Him to wash us thoroughly from our wickedness and cleanse us from our sins — yes, to purge and cleanse the very fountain of them: our unclean and polluted

hearts (Acts 15:9). And when, by God's mercy in Christ apprehended by faith, our hearts are purified, we must then stand watch over them and keep them with all diligence (Proverbs 4:23). Second, this doctrine teaches us that miserable mortal persons are guilty not of one or a few sins, but of many and various corruptions both of heart and life. Who can understand his faults? says David (Psalm 19:12). Now since the penalty for sin is death by God's ordinance, and since God is justice itself, we must be liable to many punishments in proportion to the number of our offenses — yes, even to death itself, both of body and soul. Given this sorrowful condition, no one has any reason to think himself in a good state or to presume on God's mercy because he supposes his sins to be few. Still less reason does anyone have — in the false manner of the Roman Catholics — to imagine that he can merit God's favor by some work done above and beyond what the law requires, given that it is impossible for any person to know either the number, the nature, or the measure of his sins. Lastly, the consideration of this point should serve as a check to keep us from becoming too secure or presumptuous about our condition. For from God's word we learn that, given the multitude of our corruptions, this life is full of much evil and many difficulties — that we have whole armies of enemies to face, not only outside us in the world, but also within us, lurking in our own flesh. This should cause us to be in constant opposition to those enemies, using every holy means to gain the victory over them — through daily exercises of prayer and repentance, and through a continual practice of new obedience to all the laws and commandments of God, according to the measure of grace received. And that is enough for the third foundation.

The fourth and last foundation concerns the subjection and power of conscience. Conscience is knowledge joined with knowledge. By conscience we know what we know, and by it we know about ourselves what God knows about us. The natural condition of every person's conscience is this: it is placed in the middle — between the person and God, under God and above the person. This natural condition has two parts. The first is the subjection of conscience to God and His word. The second is a power by which conscience is over the person, to press and bind him. Concerning the first, this rule holds: God alone, by His word, properly binds conscience, for He is the only Lord of the conscience — He who created it and governs it. He also is the only lawgiver who has power to save or destroy the soul by the keeping or breaking of His laws (James 4:12). Again, no one knows a person's conscience but God, and it is He alone who gives liberty to the conscience in regard to His own laws. From this it follows that no human commandment or law can by its own sovereign power bind the conscience. It can only do so by the authority and virtue of the written word of God, or some part of it. Now the power of conscience is seen in Paul's rule: Whatever is not of faith — that is, whatever a person does without being certainly persuaded in his judgment and conscience, from God's word, that it is lawful — is sin (Romans 14:23). More precisely, a thing may be said not to be done in faith in two ways. First, when it is done with a doubting and unresolved conscience, as in the case of those who are weak in knowledge. Some in the early church were of this sort. Though they had heard the doctrine of Christian liberty, they still believed that after Christ's ascension a distinction between foods ought to be made, and therefore thought they must not eat certain kinds of food. Suppose that such

persons were by some accident drawn to eat pork, which they themselves had held to be forbidden. By that very act they would have sinned, because what they did was done with an unresolved conscience. Second, when a thing is done on the basis of a mistaken conscience, it is not done in faith, and is therefore sin. The reason is this: the conscience, even when it errs and is deceived, still binds to this extent — that if a person judges a thing to be evil, either absolutely or in some respect, even if that judgment is false, and yet afterward does it, he has sinned and offended the majesty of God as much as lay in him to do.

That concludes the preambles or foundations of this doctrine. It now remains to proceed to the questions of conscience.

These questions may be conveniently divided according to their subject matter, which is the human person. Now just as a person may be considered in different ways — either by himself, or in relation to others as a member of a society — so the questions of conscience are to be divided: some concern the person simply considered in himself, and some concern the person as he stands in relation to others.

A person stands in two kinds of relationship: to God, and to other people. As he stands in relation to others, he is a part of a larger whole and a member of some society. The questions that concern him as a member of a society are of three kinds, corresponding to the three distinct types of societies. For every person is either a member of a family, a member of the church, or a member of the commonwealth. Accordingly, some questions concern a person as a member of a family, some as a member of the church, and some as a member of the commonwealth.

In short, all questions concerning the human person may be reduced to three general heads. The first concerns the person simply considered as a human being. The second concerns the person in his relationship to God. The third concerns the person as a member of one of the three societies — that is, either the family, the church, or the commonwealth.

Questions of the first kind — concerning a person as a Christian — are especially three.

The first: What must a person do to come into the favor of God and be saved? The second: How can a person be assured in conscience of his own salvation? The third: How can a person recover himself when he is distressed or has fallen?

QUESTION 1



What must a person do to come into God's favor and be saved?

To answer this question, some foundational matters must first be laid down. We must first consider and keep in mind how God, who saves, brings a person to salvation.

In working out our salvation, God performs two special works: giving the first grace, and after that, giving the second. The first of these two works involves ten distinct actions. First, God gives a person the outward means of salvation — especially the ministry of the word — and along with it He sends some outward trial or hardship, to break down and subdue the stubbornness of our nature so that it may become pliable to God's will. Second, this done, God brings the mind to a consideration of the law, and through it to a general understanding of what is good and what is evil, what is sin and what is not sin. Third, through a serious consideration of the law, He causes a person to see and recognize his own particular and personal sins. Fourth, upon seeing sin, He strikes the heart with the spirit of fear, so that when a person sees his sins, he fears punishment and hell, and despairs of salvation in regard to anything in himself.

Now these four actions are not yet fruits of grace, but only preparatory works that come before grace. The remaining actions are effects of grace. Fifth, the fifth action of grace is to stir up the mind to a serious consideration of the promise of salvation set forth and published in the Gospel. Sixth, after this, the sixth is to kindle in the heart some seeds or sparks of faith — a will and desire to believe, and grace to strive against doubting and despair. At the very instant when God begins to kindle any sparks of faith in the heart, He also justifies the sinner and at the same time begins the work of sanctification. Seventh, as soon as faith is placed in the heart, a conflict immediately begins — for faith wrestles with doubting, despair, and distrust. In this conflict, faith shows itself through fervent, constant, and earnest prayer for pardon. After this prayer follows a strengthening and prevailing of this desire. Eighth, God in mercy then quiets and settles the conscience concerning the salvation of the soul and the promise of life, upon which the conscience rests and takes its stand. Ninth, following this settled assurance and persuasion of mercy comes a stirring up of the heart to evangelical sorrow according to God — a grief for sin because it is sin and because God is offended. The Lord then works repentance, by which the sanctified heart turns itself to Him. And though this repentance comes last in order, it shows itself first — just as when a candle is brought into a room, we first see the light before we see the candle, yet the candle must exist before there can be light. Tenth, lastly, God gives a person grace to endeavor to obey His commandments through new obedience. By these steps, the Lord gives the first grace.

The second work of God tending toward salvation is to give the second grace, which is nothing other than the continuation of the first work already begun — so that a person may persevere in grace to the end.

Now to come to the answer: the Holy Spirit has set before us this question of conscience, along with its resolution, through the following examples. The men at Peter's sermon were pierced with a sense of their own misery by the doctrine that had been delivered. As the Holy Spirit records, they were cut to the heart and cried out to one another, Men and brothers, what shall we do? Peter, moved by the Spirit of God, answered them: Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38). A similar case was that of the jailer, whose stubbornness was broken down by fear at the escape of the prisoners. He came trembling and fell before Paul and Silas, asking them, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? They answered him: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 16:33). The young man in the Gospel came to Christ and asked, What shall I do to be saved? Christ answered him: Keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17). When he replied that he had kept them from his youth, Christ told him he must go further and sell all he had and give to the poor. And John told the scribes and Pharisees who came to his baptism and confessed their sins, that if they would flee from the wrath to come, they must repent and bring forth fruit worthy of a change of life (Matthew 3:8). My answer, drawn from all these passages, is that the person who would stand in God's favor and be saved must do four things: first, humble himself before God; second, believe in Christ; third, repent of his sins; fourth, perform new obedience to God.

Concerning the first. Humiliation is indeed a fruit of faith, yet I place it before faith because in practice it comes first. Faith lies hidden in the heart, and the first effect in which it shows itself is the humbling and abasing of ourselves. Here we must consider three further points: first, what humiliation consists of; second, its excellence; and third, the questions of conscience that concern it.

Concerning the first point: humiliation consists of three practices. The first is a sorrow of heart, by which the sinner is displeased with himself and ashamed on account of his sins. The second is a confession to God, in which three things are also to be done: first, to acknowledge all our principal sins, both original and actual; second, to acknowledge our guiltiness before God; and third, to acknowledge our just condemnation for sin. The third element of humiliation is supplication to God for mercy, as earnestly as if one's life depended on it. We have examples of all three of these things in Scripture in the cases of Ezra, Daniel, and the prodigal son (Ezra 9; Daniel 9; Luke 15).

The second point is the excellence of humiliation, which lies in this: it has the promises of eternal life annexed to it. Isaiah 57:15 — I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with the one who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to give life to those of a contrite heart. Psalm 51:17 — A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Proverbs 28:13 — Whoever conceals his sins will not prosper, but the one who confesses and forsakes them will find mercy. 1 John 1:9 — If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. By all these passages and many others, it is plain that at the very moment when a sinner begins to truly humble himself in heart and conscience, he has en-

tered into the state of salvation. As soon as David said, I have sinned, Nathan pronounced in the name of the Lord that his sins were put away. And David himself says, alluding to that same passage: I said, I will confess my sin — and behold, You forgave the guilt of my sin. When the prodigal son had only said, I will go to my father, etc. — even then, before he had humbled himself, his father ran to meet him and received him.

The third point concerns the questions of conscience regarding humiliation, all of which may be reduced to four main cases.

Case I. What if it happens that in humbling himself, a person cannot recall either all or most of his sins? I answer: a particular humiliation is indeed required for principal and known sins. Yet there are two situations in which a general repentance will be accepted by God for unknown sins. One is when a person has searched himself diligently, passing through all of God's commandments in a serious examination, and yet after such a search still cannot recall his particular offenses. In that case, general repentance is accepted. This corresponds to the practice of David, who after a long search, when he could not recall his particular lapses, addressed himself to a general humiliation, saying: Who can discern his errors? Cleanse me, Lord, from my hidden faults. And on this basis, he was undoubtedly accepted. Again, when a person humbles himself but is prevented by lack of time from searching his heart and life as he would wish — his general repentance will also be accepted by God. The truth of this is evident in the thief on the cross, who having no time to search himself made no specific humiliation, yet was accepted upon his general confes-

sion. The principle underlying this doctrine is: the person who truly repents of one sin, when prevented from doing more, is treated as if he had repented of all.

Case II. What must a person do who finds himself hardened and deadened in spirit, so that he cannot humble himself as he wishes? Answer: such persons must, in humbling themselves, be content with the grace they have received. For if you are truly and sincerely grieved that you cannot grieve as you ought, your humiliation will be accepted. For what Paul says about giving can be truly applied here as well: if there is a willing mind, a person will be accepted according to what he has, not according to what he does not have.

Case III. Can the person who is more grieved over the loss of a friend than over having offended God by his sin truly humble himself? Answer: a person may feel a greater grief over an earthly loss than over offending God, and yet still be truly grieved for his sins. The reason is that earthly loss is bodily, natural, and sensible, and sorrow for it is accordingly natural. Sorrow for having offended God, on the other hand, is not something sensible but supernatural and spiritual — and sensible things affect the mind more readily than spiritual ones. David humbled himself deeply for his sins, and yet he mourned excessively for the death of his son Absalom — more so, in fact, than for his sins: Would that I had died instead of you, Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son, etc. I answer further that the sorrow of the mind must be measured by the intensity of the affection and by the estimation in which the mind holds the thing mourned. Now sorrow for sin, though it may be less intense in its feeling, is yet greater in the estimation of the mind — because

those who truly mourn for their sins grieve over having offended God as the greatest evil of all, and over the loss of God's favor as the loss of the most excellent and precious thing in the world.

Case IV. Is it necessary in humiliation that the heart be struck with a tangible, felt sorrow? Answer. First, in sorrow for sin there are two things: to be displeased with oneself for one's sins, and to have a bodily movement of the heart that produces crying and tears. The first of these is necessary — namely, to be deeply displeased with oneself in heart. The second is not absolutely necessary, though it is commendable wherever it is genuine. For Lydia had the first but not the second. Second, it often happens that the very greatness of the grief takes away the felt sensation of pain and produces a numbness of the heart, so that the person is not visibly moved to tears. Third, some people's temperament does not allow for tears — and in such people there may be true humiliation, even with dry cheeks.

The second thing to be done in order to attain God's favor and consequently salvation is to believe in Christ. In the practice of the Christian life, the duties of humiliation and faith cannot be separated. Yet for the sake of teaching, I distinguish between them. Faith requires two things to be performed on our part. First, to know the points of religion — and in particular, the sum of the Gospel, especially the promise of righteousness and eternal life through Christ. Second, to apply the promise — and with it, the thing promised, which is Christ — to ourselves. This is done when a person, upon God's command, settles it within himself that Christ and His merits belong to him in particular, and that Christ is his wisdom, justification, sanctification, and redemption. This doctrine is plain from John 6, where Christ is set before us as the

bread and water of life. Therefore faith must not be idle in the mind alone. It must take hold of Christ and apply Him to the soul and conscience, just as food is taken and eaten.

The questions of conscience touching faith are these. First, how may we truly apply Christ with all His benefits to ourselves? For wicked people apply Christ to themselves falsely, out of presumption, but few do it truly as they ought. I answer that to do this rightly, two things must be remembered. First, lay down a foundation for this action, and then act on it. Our foundation must be laid in the word, or we will fail in our application. It consists of two principles. The first: just as God gives a promise of eternal life through Christ, so He gives the commandment that every person in particular should apply that promise to himself. The second: the ministry of the word is the ordinary means by which God offers and applies Christ with all His benefits to the hearers — as if He called each one by name: Peter, John, Cornelius, believe in Christ and you will be saved. When we have rightly considered our foundation, the second thing is to act on it. That is, to give ourselves to the exercises of faith and repentance — which consist in meditation on the word and prayer for mercy and pardon. When this is done, God gives the sense and increase of His grace. When Lydia was hearing Paul's sermon, God opened her heart (Acts 16:12).

Second, it is asked: when does faith begin to grow in the heart, and when does a person begin to believe in Christ? Answer: when he begins to be convicted in conscience of his own sins, and at the same time hungers and thirsts for Christ and His righteousness — that is when faith begins. The reason is plain. Just as faith is renewed, so it is first begun — and it is renewed when a person is convicted in conscience for his sins and begins again to hunger for

Christ. Therefore, when these things first appear, faith first begins. For these were the things present in David when he renewed his repentance (Psalm 51).

The third duty necessary for salvation is repentance. In repentance, two things are to be considered: its beginning — namely, a godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7) — and following that sorrow, a change. In regard to sorrow, we consider first its nature, and then its properties. Touching the nature of sorrow: it is either inward or outward. Inward sorrow is when a person is displeased with himself for his sins. Outward sorrow is when the heart expresses that grief through tears or similar signs. In this case, the sorrow called godly sorrow is to be measured more by the first of these than by the second. The property of this sorrow is to make us displeased with ourselves directly for our sins — because they are sins and because they displease God. Even if there were no judge, no hell, no death, we should still be grieved because we have offended so merciful a God and loving Father. And just as godly sorrow works this in us, it is also the immediate cause of repentance, and by this it may be distinguished.

The next element of repentance is the change of the mind and the whole person — in affection, life, and conduct. This consists in a constant purpose of mind and a firm resolution of heart not to sin, but in all things to do the will of God. Paul accordingly exhorts those to whom he wrote to continue in the love of God and in obedience to His word. When Barnabas came to Antioch and saw the grace of God, he was glad and exhorted everyone that with purpose of heart they should cleave to God — that is, continue with the Lord (Acts 11:23). Similarly, the prophet Ezekiel says: If the wicked will turn from all his sins and keep all my statutes and do what is

lawful and right, he shall surely live and shall not die (Ezekiel 18:21). In this purpose lies the very nature of repentance. It must be joined with humiliation and faith as a third thing essential to salvation, not to be separated from them. For a person may appear to have many good things — he may seem humbled, and to have some measure of faith — yet if he lacks this purpose and resolution not to sin, the other things are dead and unprofitable, and despite them all, he may come to eternal destruction. Furthermore, we must distinguish this kind of purpose from the desires and purposes of carnal people — thieves, drunkards, prostitutes, and usurers. For such people will confess their sins, be sorry for them, and even shed some tears, wishing they had never sinned as they have. In these people there is for the moment a wishing will, but no settled purpose. It is natural to want to avoid evil — but to have a constant resolution not to sin is a gift of grace. For this we must labor; otherwise our repentance is not true and genuine repentance.

The fourth and last duty is to perform new obedience to God in life and conduct. In this new obedience, three things are required. First, it must be a fruit of the Spirit of Christ in us — for when we do any good thing, it is Christ who does it in us (John 15:5). Paul says: the good that I do, I do not do myself, but Christ who lives in me. Second, this new obedience must consist in keeping every commandment of God. For as James says: the one who breaks one commandment is guilty of all (James 2:10) — that is, whoever willingly and knowingly breaks any commandment and makes no conscience of it, makes no conscience of any of them, and before God he is as guilty as if he had broken all of them. Third, in new obedience, the whole person must endeavor to keep the whole law — in

mind, will, affections, and all the faculties of soul and body. As it is said of Josiah, that he turned to God according to all the law of Moses, with all his heart (2 Kings 23:25). There are also three further things required of the one who performs new obedience. First, he must not live in the practice of any outward sin. Second, there must be an inward resisting and restraining of the corruption of our nature and of our hearts, so that by the grace of the Spirit of God we may truly obey God. The heart of Joseph was ready to resist the evil request of Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39:9-10). And David restrained his desire to avenge himself on Shimei when Shimei cursed him (2 Samuel 16:10). Third, he must stir up and exercise the inner person through all spiritual movements of faith, joy, love, hope, and the praise of God.

Here a necessary question arises. Given that all good works are the fruits of a regenerate person and fall under new obedience, how may a person do a good work that will be accepted by God and please Him? To resolve this, we must carefully note that for a good work to be done rightly, several things are required. Some of these precede the work to be done, some accompany the doing of it, and some follow after the work is finished. Before the work, reconciliation must come first. The person must be reconciled to God in Christ and be pleasing to Him. For if the person of the worker does not please God, neither will the work itself. Works, however impressive they may appear, are not to be judged by their outward show, but by the mind and condition of the one who does them. Again, before doing any good work, we must lift up our hearts to God in prayer and ask Him to enable us by His Spirit to do it, and to guide us in what we are about to do. David did this many times, as we can read throughout the Psalms — but especially in Psalm

143:10, where he says: Teach me to do Your will, O God, for You are my God; let Your good Spirit lead me to the land of righteousness.

In the doing of the work, two things are to be considered: the matter and the manner of doing it. As for the matter, it must be a work commanded in the word of God. Christ says of the Pharisees that they worshiped Him in vain, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Mark 7:7). Therefore the person who wants to do a work tending toward the worship of God must do what God commands. Here we must remember that an indifferent thing, in the case of causing offense, comes under a commandment of the moral law. To this point Paul says: If eating meat causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again (1 Corinthians 8:13). His meaning is that though eating meat was an indifferent thing in itself, in the case of giving offense, he was resolved to abstain from it just as firmly as from a violation of God's law. Again, if an indifferent action falls within the scope of furthering the good of the commonwealth or the church, it ceases to be indifferent and comes under a commandment. In this way, all kinds of callings and their works — however lowly — may be the matter of good works. Now as for the form or manner of the work: there must first be a general faith, by which we are persuaded that the thing to be done may lawfully be done — for whatever is not of faith is sin. Second, there must be a particular or justifying faith, which purifies the heart and makes it fit to bring forth a good work. It gives the work its beginning and also covers its defects and shortcomings by grasping and applying to us Christ and His merits. Third, it must be done in obedience. Knowing that the thing to be done is commanded by God, we must have in mind the intention to obey

God in what we do. It will be asked here: since works must be done in obedience, to what part of the word should our obedience be directed? I answer: to the law — but not in its strict rigor, rather as it is qualified, softened, and tempered by the Gospel. For according to the strict rigor of the law, which demands perfect obedience, no person can possibly do a good work.

Furthermore, the ends of a good work are many. First, the honor and glory of God. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Second, to testify our thankfulness to God, who has redeemed us through Christ. Third, to edify our neighbor and help him along the way to eternal life. Fourth, to exercise and strengthen our faith and repentance, both of which are greatly built up through the practice of good works. Fifth, that we may escape the punishment of sin — the destruction of the wicked — and obtain the reward of the righteous: eternal life. Sixth, that we may be consistent with our calling by performing its duties and walking as children of light, redeemed by Christ Jesus. Seventh, that we may pay the debt we owe to God. For we are debtors to Him in many respects — as His creatures, as His servants, as His children, and above all as those redeemed by Christ. Our whole debt is our duty of praise and thanksgiving.

After the work is done, then comes its acceptance. God accepts our works in two ways: first, by pardoning the fault that comes from us; and second, by approving His own good work in us. After doing any work, we must humble ourselves and ask the Lord to pardon the deficiencies of our works, saying with David: Lord, do not enter into judgment with Your servant (Psalm 143:2), and with Daniel: Lord, to us belongs open shame and confusion, but to You belong righteousness, compassion, and forgiveness (Daniel 9:8-9).

The reason is plain: in us there is no goodness, no holiness, no righteousness, nothing that could present us as acceptable in His sight. For this reason Paul says: I know nothing against myself, yet I am not thereby justified. Great reason, then, that we should humble ourselves before God for our failings, and pray that He will in mercy accept our endeavors and confirm the good work He has begun in us by His Holy Spirit.

QUESTION 2



The next general question concerning a person as a Christian is: how may a person be assured in conscience of his own salvation?

To answer this question, several passages of Scripture are to be examined, in which this case of conscience is fully answered and resolved.

The first passage is Romans 8:16. The Spirit of God testifies together with our spirits that we are the sons of God. In these words two testimonies of our adoption are set forth: the Spirit of God dwelling in us and testifying to us that we are God's children; and our spirit — that is, our conscience, sanctified and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Suppose the testimony of the Spirit is absent: I answer that the other testimony — the sanctification of the heart — will suffice to assure us. We know sufficiently that a fire is real, not painted, if there is heat even without a flame.

Suppose again that both the testimony of the Spirit and our certainty about our own sanctification are absent: how then may we be assured? The answer is that we must then turn to the first beginnings and stirrings of sanctification, which are these. First, to

feel our inward corruptions. Second, to be displeased with ourselves for them. Third, to begin to hate sin. Fourth, to grieve each time we fall and offend God. Fifth, to avoid the occasions of sin. Sixth, to endeavor to do our duty and to use good means. Seventh, to desire to sin no more. And lastly, to pray to God for His grace. Where these and similar stirrings are present, the Spirit of God is there — for they proceed from Him — and sanctification has begun. One apple is enough to show that a tree is alive, and one good and consistent movement of grace is enough to show that sanctification is real. Again, it may be asked: what must be done if both are absent? Answer: people must not despair, but use good means, and in time they will be assured.

The second passage is Psalm 15. In the first verse, the question is raised: who among all the members of the church will dwell in heaven? The answer is given in the verses that follow. In the second verse, three general marks of such a person are set down. One is to walk uprightly in sincerity, approving his heart and life before God. The second is to deal justly in all his doings. The third is, in speech, to speak the truth from the heart, without guile or flattery. Because we are easily deceived by general signs, in verses three, four, and five, seven more specific and recognizable marks of sincerity, justice, and truth are set down. One is in speech: not to take up or spread false reports and slanders. The second is in dealings: not to do wrong to our neighbor any more than to ourselves. The third is in company: to condemn those who are worthy to be condemned as wicked. The fourth is in the esteem we have of others: to honor those who fear God. The fifth is in our words: to swear and not change — that is, to make conscience of our word and promise, especially when confirmed by oath. The sixth is in taking

money: not to lend at interest — that is, not to take increase for bare lending — and to lend freely to the poor. The last is to give testimony without bribery or partiality. In the fifth verse a reason is added for the answer: the person who endeavors to do all these things will never be moved — that is, never be cut off from the church as a hypocrite.

The third Scripture passage is the first epistle of John, whose principal aim is to give a full resolution to the conscience regarding the certainty of salvation. The main grounds of assurance set forth there may be reduced to three heads.

The first is this. The person who has communion or fellowship with God in Christ may be undoubtedly assured of his salvation. This conclusion is set forth in chapter 1, verses 3-4, where the apostle tells the church that the aim of his preaching the Gospel to them was that they might have fellowship not only with one another but also with God the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 5:11). And further, that by having both knowledge and assurance of this heavenly communion — begun in this life and to be perfected in the life to come — their joy might be full, that is, they might from this draw true joy and sound comfort for their souls and consciences. Now where a believer might ask how to come to this assurance, John answers in this epistle that certainty of it may be gathered from four infallible marks. The first is the forgiveness of sins. For though God is in Himself most holy and pure, and no mortal person — being unclean and polluted by sin — can have fellowship with Him, yet God has shown His mercy to those who believe in Him and has accepted the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, by which they are cleansed from all their corruptions (verse 7). If it is asked how this pardon and forgiveness may be known, it is an-

swered by two signs. One is humble and heartfelt confession of our sins to God — for as the apostle says: if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity (verse 9). The other is the pacified conscience. For being justified by faith, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). And, if our heart does not condemn us — that is, if our conscience does not accuse us in respect of sin — then we have confidence toward God (chapter 3, verse 21). The second mark of fellowship with God is the sanctifying Spirit, by which we are renewed in holiness and righteousness: Hereby we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us (chapter 3, verse 24). The third is holiness and uprightness of heart and life. To this end the apostle says: if we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and so forth (chapter 1, verses 6-7). The fourth is perseverance in the knowledge and obedience of the Gospel. So the same apostle exhorts the church: Let that teaching about Christ which you heard from the beginning remain in you. If what you heard from the beginning remains in you — that is, if you believe and obey it — you also shall continue in the Son and in the Father (chapter 2, verse 24).

The second ground. The person who is an adopted son of God will undoubtedly be saved. The apostle makes this plain when he says: Beloved, now are we the sons of God (chapter 3, verse 2). And we know — that is, we are undoubtedly assured by faith — that when Christ shall appear in glory, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. I gather that the latter part of these words is to be understood this way from chapter 2, verse 28, and also by comparing this text with Paul's words: when Christ, who is our life,

shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory (Colossians 3:4). And again: if we are sons, we are also heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ — if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). Now suppose a believer's conscience will not rest in this, but wants to be further resolved regarding the certainty of his adoption? Then I answer that he must look to the signs by which a son of God may be distinguished from a child of the devil. These are principally three. The first is to truly believe in the name of the Son of God, for those who have God as their Father are made sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26). And this faith shows itself through obedience. For we know that we know Christ — that is, that we believe in Him and apply Him with all His benefits to our souls — if we keep His commandments. Indeed, the person who says I know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him (chapter 2, verses 3-4). The second sign is a heartfelt desire and earnest effort to be cleansed from corruptions. Everyone who is a son of God and has this hope purifies himself, even as Christ is pure (chapter 3, verse 3). The third is love for a Christian because he is a Christian and a child of God. For by this, says the apostle, are the children of God known from the children of the devil: the sons of Satan hate their brethren — as Cain hated his brother Abel — precisely for the good works they do. On the other side, God's adopted sons may know themselves to have been translated from death to life by this: because they love the brethren (chapter 3, verses 10-12, and following).

The third ground. Those who are assured of God's special love for them in particular may also be certainly assured of their own salvation. This doctrine follows necessarily from the apostle's

words in chapter 4, verse 9. For those whom God has loved from all eternity, He has shown His love to them by sending His only begotten Son into the world, that they might live through Him eternally. But how may a person be assured of God's special love and favor? The same apostle answers with two marks. The first is love of our brethren — according to God's commandment that the one who loves God should also love his brother (chapter 4, verse 21). And if anyone says I love God but hates his brother, he is a liar. For how can the one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, love God, whom he has not seen? (chapter 4, verse 20). Now that a person not deceive himself in his love of his brother, John gives three rules. One: Christian brotherly love must not be based on outward considerations but principally on this — that they are sons of God and members of Christ: Everyone who loves the Father loves the one begotten by Him (chapter 5, verse 1). Another: it must not be outward, in show only, but inward and in the heart. Let us not love in word or in tongue only, but in deed and in truth (chapter 3, verse 18). Lastly, it must not be only in times of prosperity, but especially when he stands in greatest need of our love. For whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (chapter 3, verse 17). The second mark of God's love for us is our love of God. For those whom God loves in Christ, He gives grace to love Him in return. And this loving of Him in return is clear evidence of the love with which He loves them. So says the apostle: we love Him because He first loved us (chapter 4, verse 19). If it is asked how a person may be assured that he loves God, the answer is that he may know it by two things. First, by his conformity to God in holiness. The child who loves his father will be

willing to follow in his father's footsteps. In the same way, the one who loves God will endeavor, as He is, so to be in this world (chapter 4, verse 17). But how so? Not in equality and perfection, but in likeness and conformity — striving to be holy as He is holy, and endeavoring to do His will in all things. Second, by the weaning of his affection from the things of this world — yes, from all pleasures and delights of this present life, insofar as they are separated from the fear and love of God: Do not love the world nor the things in the world; if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (chapter 2, verse 15).

A fifth passage of Scripture on this question is 2 Timothy 2:19. The foundation of God stands firm, having this seal: the Lord knows those who are His, and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. In these words, Paul seeks to remove an offense that the church might take from the fall of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who had appeared to be pillars and principal figures in the church. To strengthen the church against this offense, he says: the foundation of God — that is, the decree of God's election — stands firm and sure, so that those elected by God will never fall away as these two have done. He declares this through a double comparison. First, he says the election of God is like the foundation of a house, which stands firm even when the whole building is shaken. Second, he says that election has the seal of God and therefore cannot be changed, since things that are sealed are made certain and authoritative. Now this seal has two parts. The first concerns God: every person's salvation is written in the book of life, and God knows who are His. But it might be asked: God knows who will be saved — but what does that mean for us, who do not know this about ourselves? Therefore Paul sets

down a second part of this seal — one that concerns the person and is imprinted on his heart and conscience. This also has two branches: the gift of prayer, and a watchful care to make conscience of every sin. These are expressed in the words, Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity. By this Paul indicates that those who can call upon God and give Him thanks for His benefits — and who in their lives also make conscience of sin — have the seal of God's election imprinted in their hearts and may assure themselves that they are the Lord's.

A fifth passage of Scripture on this question is 2 Peter 1:10. Be diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these things, you will never stumble. These words contain two parts. First, an exhortation to make our election sure — not with God, for all things are known to Him, but to ourselves, in our own hearts and consciences. Second, the means by which to come to this assurance: namely, by practicing the virtues named in verses 5, 6, and 7. I will briefly show what these are as they appear in the text.

To your faith, add virtue. By faith he means true religion and that gift of God by which we put our trust and confidence in Christ. By virtue he means not any single virtue, but — as I take it — an honest and upright life before others, shown in the virtues and works of the moral law. By knowledge he means a gift of God by which a person may judge how to conduct himself wisely and uprightly before others. By self-control is meant a gift of God by which we keep a moderation of our natural appetites, especially regarding food, drink, and clothing. By patience is meant a virtue by which we moderate our grief in enduring affliction. Godliness is another virtue by which we worship God in the duties of the first

table. Brotherly kindness is also a virtue by which we embrace the church of God and its members with the warmth of love. And finally, love is the virtue by which we are well disposed toward all people, even our enemies. Having listed these virtues, in the tenth verse he says: if you practice these things, you will never stumble — that is, if you exercise yourselves in these things, you may thereby be well assured and persuaded of your election and salvation.

QUESTION 3



The last general question concerning a person as a Christian is: how may a person who is in distress of mind be comforted and relieved?

Setting aside all surrounding details — for much could be said about this question — I will set down only what I take to be most essential to the matter at hand.

Distress of mind — which Solomon calls a broken or troubled spirit — is when a person is unsettled and disordered in conscience, and consequently in his affections, regarding his standing before God. This distress has two degrees: the lesser and the greater. The lesser is a simple fear or grief, when a person is in suspense and doubt about his own salvation and fears he will be condemned. The greater distress is despair, when a person has, in his own sense and experience, no hope of salvation at all. I call despair the greater distress because it is not a separate kind of trouble of mind — as some think — but rather the highest degree found in every kind of distress. For every distress of mind is a fear of condemnation, and if left uncured it will eventually come to despair.

All distress of mind arises from temptation — either ongoing or newly begun. These two are so necessarily connected and so inseparably accompany each other that no distress of any kind can be separated from temptation. Therefore, according to the various kinds of temptations that befall people, the distresses of mind must be distinguished.

Now temptations are of two sorts: either temptations of trial or temptations of seduction. Temptations of trial are those that befall people for the testing and proving of the grace of God in them. These are of two kinds. The first is a direct and immediate combat of the conscience with the wrath of God. Being the most grievous temptation that can exist, it causes the greatest and deepest distress of conscience. The second is the trial of the cross — that is, outward affliction — by which God tests the faith of His children, and not only faith, but also their hope, patience, and trust in His mercy for their deliverance.

Temptations of seduction are those by which people are enticed to fall from God and Christ into some kind of evil. These are of three kinds. The first is the temptation of blasphemy — the blasphemous temptation — which comes directly from the devil. The second comes from a person's own sins, both original and actual. This also has various branches, as we will see later. The third proceeds from a corrupted and deceived imagination. Corresponding to these different kinds of temptations are different kinds of distress. And just as all temptations may be reduced to those five kinds, so all distresses may be reduced to five heads, arising from the temptations named above.

Before addressing each kind of distress in particular, we must first consider what is the best and most reliable general remedy that may serve for all of these — or any other kind of temptation that a person may face. With this established, the cure of any particular distress will be easier to see.

This general remedy is the applying of the promise of everlasting life in and through the blood of Christ. For no medicine, no human art or skill, can cure a wounded and distressed conscience — only the blood of Christ can do that. No one doubts that this is the sovereign remedy above all others. The main difficulty lies in how to proceed in applying the promise. In this, three things must be done.

First of all, the person must disclose the cause of his particular distress, so that the remedy may be better applied. For simply opening up the cause is itself a great relief to the mind, even before any remedy is applied. Yet by the way, care must be taken that what is disclosed is not harmful to the person to whom it is revealed. For the distress may arise from some involvement in matters of treason, by concealing which the person hearing the disclosure might himself become entangled in the same danger.

Second, if the cause can be known — for sometimes it is hidden even from the distressed person — then inquiry must be made as to whether the person is fit for comfort or not. For if he is found to be unfit, the word of God will be misapplied and consequently abused. His readiness for comfort may be discovered by searching whether he has been humbled for his sins or not. For people can be in great distress and yet not at all touched for their sins. This humiliation consists in sorrow for sin, with confession of it to God, earnest prayer for its pardon, and a heartfelt desire for a changed

life. But if on the other side the person is unhumiliated, then the first and principal concern must be to work in him some beginning of humiliation. This may be done through friendly and Christian conversation, in which he must first be brought to see and seriously consider his own sins — and second, to grieve and be sorry for them, at least for some of the most significant ones.

Regarding this sorrow, two things must be remembered. First, the nature of worldly sorrow must be changed — turned and redirected into sorrow according to God. If a person is in danger of his life from a nosebleed, medical experience teaches that the physician should open a vein and draw blood from the arm, to redirect the flow another way. A similar approach must be taken with those who are troubled by worldly sorrow in their distress: the course of their grief must be redirected, causing them to grieve not for worldly reasons, or only out of fear of punishment for their sins, but principally because of the offense against God in and through the sins they have committed.

This done, a second concern must be that this sorrow for sin not be vague, but specific. The person in sorrow must not be grieved merely because he is a sinner like other people, but more particularly because of this or that specific sin — so that his sorrow in regard to sin may be focused and brought, as it were, to a particular point. In this case, those caring for the distressed person must deal with him as surgeons deal with a tumor or swelling in the body. Surgeons apply drawing and ripening plasters to the affected area, to bring the sore to a head so that the infection may be discharged from one specific place. After this, healing plasters are applied and do great work in curing it. In the same way, vague grief must be directed to specific matters. Only then — and not before —

is a person ready for comfort, when his conscience is specifically touched in regard to one or more distinct and particular offenses. And the person who is truly and sincerely grieved from the heart for one sin will proportionally be grieved for all the sins he knows to be in himself.

The third thing required in applying this remedy is the ministering and conveying of comfort to the mind of the one who has confessed his sins and been truly humbled. This is the most important point of all. If the question is how this comfort should be ministered, the answer is that it may be done by bringing the troubled person within the scope of the promise of life. There are two ways of doing this: one false, and one true.

Some think that people may be brought within the covenant by the doctrine of universal grace and redemption. But this way of persuading us of our place in the covenant of grace is both false and unfit. It is false because all the promises of the Gospel are limited by the condition of faith and repentance. They are not universal to all people, but made only to those who repent and believe. Therefore they are indefinite in regard to all of humanity, but for believers they are universal.

It is objected that God desires all people to be saved. Answer: the apostle is the best interpreter of himself, and in the Acts he says to the same effect: The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. In these words Paul adds the circumstance of time — now — to limit this good will of God to the final age of the world, after the coming of Christ in the flesh, not to extend it to all of Adam's descendants throughout all ages. And so must the passage to Timothy be understood: God desires all people to be saved — that is, now, in this fi-

nal age of the world. In the same way the same apostle, in 2 Corinthians 6, expounds a certain prophecy of Isaiah concerning the acceptable time of grace. Now, he says, is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation — meaning the time of the New Testament. And in Colossians 1:26: the mystery hidden from the beginning is now made manifest to the saints. And in Romans 16:26: the revelation of the secret mystery is now opened. All these passages and many others on the same subject carry this circumstance of time — now — and must therefore be limited to this final age of the world. As for the word all, it must not be understood of every individual person, but of all kinds, sorts, conditions, and ranks of people. This is clear from the surrounding words: I desire that prayers be made for all people — not for every individual (since there are some who sin unto death, for whom we are not to pray) — but for all states of people: rulers as well as subjects, poor as well as rich, lowly as well as noble, unlearned as well as learned, etc.

But the saying of Paul is pressed: God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). Therefore the promise in Christ belongs to the whole world and consequently to everyone. Answer: the same apostle shall again answer for himself. Romans 11:15 — The casting away of the Jews is the reconciliation of the world — that is, of the Gentiles in the final age of the world. For he had stated this more plainly before: the falling away of the Jews is the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them is the riches of the Gentiles. And so must that passage to the Corinthians be understood: not of all and every person in all ages and times, but of those who were — through the dispensing of the Gospel — to be called out of all kingdoms and nations after the death and ascen-

sion of Christ. Therefore the promise of salvation is not universal without exception or restriction, and an application of comfort that rests on the universality of the promise is in some degree false.

Second, this way of applying is also unfit. For the reasoning would run like this: Christ died for all people; but you are a person; therefore Christ died for you. The distressed person will grant all of this and yet say: Christ indeed died for him — if only he would have received Christ — but by his sin he has cut himself off from his Savior and forsaken Him, and therefore the benefit of His death will do him no good.

The right way of ministering comfort to a distressed person now follows. In addressing this, I will first lay down the foundations by which any person who belongs to God may be brought within the covenant. Then I will show the right way in which these foundations must be used and applied.

Concerning the first. We must not have recourse to all graces, or to all degrees and measures of grace, but only to those that a troubled conscience can feel and reach. For the true children of God who have excellent measures of grace, when they are in distress, feel little or no grace at all in themselves. The graces that serve this purpose are three: faith, repentance, and the true love of God — which is the fruit of them both. And so that we may more easily and truly discern these graces and not be deceived, inquiry must be made into what the seeds and beginnings of each of them are.

The first foundation of grace is this: a desire to repent and believe, arising from a touched heart and conscience, is — though not in nature, yet in God's acceptance — faith and repentance itself. I

prove it this way. It is a principle granted and acknowledged by all: that in those who have grace, God accepts the will for the deed. If there is a willing mind, says the apostle, it is accepted not according to what a person does not have, but according to what he has. Again, God has attached a promise of blessedness and eternal life to the true and sincere desire for grace. This is why Scripture pronounces blessed those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. And who are they but those who feel themselves to lack all righteousness and truly and earnestly desire it in their hearts? For hunger and thirst indicate both a want of something and a felt awareness of that want. To this end the Holy Spirit says: to the one who is thirsty I will give drink from the water of life freely. Now this thirsty soul is the person who feels himself destitute of all grace and God's favor in Christ, and who thirsts after the blood of Christ and desires to be made a partaker of it. God is accustomed to mercifully accept the desire for any good thing when a person is in necessity and stands in want of it. The Lord, says David, hears the desire of the poor — that is, of those who are in distress of body or mind. Indeed, He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him.

It will be said that the desire for good things is natural, and therefore God will not regard people's desires. I answer: desires are of two kinds. Some are for things that people by the mere light of nature know to be good — for example, the desire for wisdom, civil virtue, honor, happiness, and the like. All these nature can desire. Others are above nature — such as the desire for the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation, and sanctification. Those who seriously desire these have a promise of blessedness and eternal life. And

from this it follows that the desire for mercy in the absence of mercy is mercy itself, and the desire for grace in the absence of grace is grace itself.

A second foundation is this. A godly sorrow, by which a person is grieved for his sins because they are sins, is the beginning of repentance — and in substance is repentance itself. The apostle Paul rejoiced that through his ministry he had worked this godly sorrow in the hearts of the Corinthians, calling it a sorrow that leads to repentance and is not to be regretted. This sorrow may be recognized in this way: the heart of the person in whom it dwells is so affected that even if there were no conscience, no devil to accuse, and no hell for condemnation — it would still be grieved in itself, because God is displeased and offended by sin.

If it is objected that not everyone can reach this beginning of repentance and sorrow for sin, I add further: if the person is grieved over the hardness of his heart, by which it comes about that he cannot grieve as he should, he has undoubtedly received some portion of godly sorrow. For it is not nature that makes us grieve over hardness of heart — it is grace.

The third foundation is this: a settled purpose and willing mind to forsake all sin and turn to God — even though no outward conversion has yet appeared — is a good beginning of true conversion and repentance. I thought, says David, I will confess against myself my wickedness to the Lord — and You forgave the penalty of my sin. And to this the word *Selah* is added, which is not only a musical notation but — as some think — a marker of observation, prompting us to take special note of what is recorded as being of particular weight and importance. And surely it is a matter of great consequence: that upon the very sincere purpose of confessing sin,

God should grant pardon for it. Take a further proof of this in the prodigal son, whom I understand not as one who was never called or converted to God — though some take this view and seem to have warrant for it — but rather as one who is a child of God and afterward falls away. Such a person, being brought by outward trials and afflictions to see his own misery, purposes in himself to return to his Father, to humble himself, and to confess his iniquity. Upon this very purpose — when he had said, I will arise and go to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned, etc. — at his return from a distance, his father receives him as his child again. Acceptance comes first, and confession follows. The same is seen in David, who, upon being rebuked by the prophet Nathan for his sins of adultery and murder, immediately confessed them — and at that very moment received from the prophet the sentence of absolution from the Lord Himself, wherein He could not err.

The fourth foundation. To love any person because he is a Christian and a child of God is a clear and certain mark of a person who is a partaker of the true love of God in Christ. By this, says John, we know that we are passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. Love here is not a cause, but only a sign, of God's love to us. And our Savior Christ says: the one who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Now that we not be deceived in these foundations, we must remember that these beginnings of grace — however weak they may be — must not be fleeting and unstable, but constant and settled. They must not be stopped or stalled partway, but must daily grow and increase. When that is the case, they are indeed accepted by

God. And the person who can find these beginnings, or any of them, truly in himself, may thereby assure himself that he is a child of God.

Having laid down these foundations of comfort, I now come to the way in which the distressed person may be brought within the scope of the promise of salvation. This way consists in two things: making trial, and applying the promise.

First, then, a trial must be made whether the distressed person has any of the forenamed foundations of grace in him or not. This trial may be made by the comforter through asking certain questions of the person. First, let him ask whether the person believes and repents. The distressed person answers: no, he cannot repent or believe. He must then ask further: does he desire to believe and repent? To this the person will answer: yes, he desires it with all his heart. In the same way, trial is to be made of the other foundations. When a person is in the grip of temptation, he will say with certainty that he is sure to be damned. Ask him in this fit about his love for God, and he will say he has none at all. But ask him further whether he loves a person because that person is a Christian and a child of God — and then he will say that he does indeed. In this way, after trial is made in this manner, some beginnings of faith and repentance will appear that were hidden at first. For God is accustomed, out of times of prosperity, to work His grace through and in distress and affliction.

The second point follows. After some of the forenamed beginnings of grace have been found by trial, the right applying of the promise of everlasting life to the distressed person comes next. This is done through a form of reasoning, the first part of which is taken from God's word, the second from the testimony of the dis-

tressed conscience, and the conclusion is the applying of the promise — in this manner: The person who has a sincere desire to repent and believe has forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. But you have an earnest desire to repent and believe in Christ. Therefore forgiveness of sins and everlasting life are yours.

Note here that it is most fitting for this application to be made by the minister of the Gospel, who must use his ministerial authority — given to him by God — to pronounce the pardon. For in distress, it is as difficult to make the conscience yield to the promise as it is to make fire and water agree. For though people may have signs of grace and mercy in them, they will not acknowledge it, because of the extremity of their distress. In this manner, upon any of the former foundations, the troubled and perplexed soul may be assured that mercy belongs to it. And this, I take it, is the only general and right way of comforting a distressed conscience.

Now for the promise thus applied to have good effect, these rules must carefully be observed.

First: the comfort that is ministered should be tempered with some admixture of the law — that is, the promise alone must not be applied, but along with it, mention must be made of the person's sins and of the grievous punishments due to him for them. The reason is that there is much deceit in the heart of a person, so that it often happens that those who are not thoroughly humbled, being comforted either too soon or too much, afterward become the worst of all. This is not unlike iron that is cast into intensely hot fire and then cooled again — it becomes far harder than it would have been had the heat been moderate. For this reason, in ministering comfort, we must somewhat hold people back and

bring them on little by little to repentance. The sweetness of comfort is all the greater when it is tempered with some bitterness of the law.

Second: another rule is this. If the distressed person is deeply overwhelmed with grief, he must not be left alone, but always attended by good company. For it is the devil's common practice to take advantage of the time and place when a person is solitary and deprived of the help he might otherwise receive from the company of others. This is how he tempted Eve when she was apart from her husband. For this reason, Solomon declares a woe upon the person who is alone. But the devil's malice shows itself most clearly in this: he is always readiest when a person is in great distress and alone — ready at that very moment to tempt him to despair and to taking his own life.

Third: the distressed person must be taught not to rely on his own judgment, but always to submit himself and be willing to be advised by others who are wise, sound in judgment, and discerning. This is all the more to be observed because the neglect of this very thing has caused many people to remain uncomforted for years.

Fourth: the distressed person must never hear of fearful incidents, or of others who have been in a situation like or worse than his own. For upon hearing such reports, the distressed conscience will fasten the incident upon itself, and this will commonly draw it into deeper grief or despair. For the afflicted mind will imagine terrible things, and sometimes the mere mention of the devil will strike terror and fear into it.

Fifth: the person ministering comfort must bear with all the weaknesses of the distressed person — with their fretfulness, irritability, rashness, and their disordered and unruly affections and actions. He must, as it were, put on their persons, being moved by their misery and touched by their sorrows as if they were his own — grieving when he sees them grieve, weeping when they weep and lament.

Sixth: the comforter must not be discouraged even if after long labor and effort, little comfort and ease come to the distressed person. For it is usually a long time before comfort can be received. Why? Because God has the greatest hand in these distresses of mind and brings people through all the temptations He has appointed before He opens the heart to receive comfort. The bride in the Song of Songs searches for her beloved. But before she can find him, she goes about the city, through the streets and open places, passing by the watchmen themselves. After she has used every means without help or hope, at last she finds her beloved — the one in whom her soul delights.

That is enough for the general remedy of all distresses. I now come to the particular distresses themselves.

The first distress arises from a divine temptation — a direct combat with God Himself. This distress is when the conscience speaks fearful things about God, and at the same time the distressed person feels clear tokens of God's wrath. We find many examples of this in the word of God. One is the example of righteous Job, who, after a long period of outward afflictions, was also exercised with an apprehension of God's anger. In that state he says that the arrows of the Almighty were in him, that their venom drank up his spirit, and that the terrors of God fought against him.

He adds further that God was his enemy, wrote bitter things against him, and made him to possess the sins of his youth. At another time he complains that God's wrath had torn him, that He hated him, gnashed upon him with His teeth, and had sharpened His eyes against him. In all these and other passages, it is clear that his conscience was exercised with the felt sense of God's wrath, which had now seized upon his very soul.

Another example we have in David, who also underwent this temptation and trouble of mind, as the opening words of Psalm 6 and its entire tenor clearly show. First he asks the Lord not to rebuke him in His wrath, and then he complains that his grief was so great that his very flesh was wasting, his bones were troubled, and his body was reduced to a condition no sickness could have caused. And it is quite likely that the same prophet fell repeatedly into this kind of distress of mind, as may be gathered from Psalm 77 and various other passages.

Now as it was with these and various other servants of God in ancient times, so we are not without instances of this in our own day. Among many others, that worthy man Martin Luther writes of himself that he was in this very temptation, and that through it he came to learn the doctrine of the justification of a sinner by the mere mercy of God, apart from any merit of works. From his personal sense and experience of the nature and character of this distress, he wrote a notable commentary on Psalm 6 of David, the scope and intent of which, he writes, is nothing else but a sovereign remedy for this and similar distresses of the mind and conscience.

If it is asked what occasions this kind of temptation, I answer that it sometimes arises upon the commission of some notorious sin that wounds the conscience — as it did in Cain, Judas, and Saul, who because of their great and capital sins, which stung and wounded their consciences, fell into a fearful condition and consequently perished in this temptation. At other times it comes when no sin has been committed, but rather when a person is walking in obedience to God. In such cases no reason for it can be found either within or outside the person, except this: God wills it to be so. And the truth of this is plain from the examples of Job and David mentioned above.

The effects of this temptation are many and very strange. Outwardly it works upon the body like a burning fever, causing the inner organs to churn, the liver to roll within the body, a great heat to settle in the bones, and wasting of the flesh that surpasses what any sickness could cause. That this is so, beyond experience itself, is clear from God's word. David, in this distress, says that his eyes were consumed and sunken into his head (Psalm 6:7), and that his strength dried up like the heat of summer (Psalm 32:4). And Job says that his skin had turned dark, his bones were burning with heat, and that through this distress he was now full of wrinkles and his leanness was rising upon him. Physicians hold it as a principle that the mind follows the temperature of the body and is affected according to its good or ill constitution — which is true. Yet it is just as evident on the other side that the body often follows the state of the mind. For a distressed heart will necessarily produce a fainting and languishing body.

But the chief thing to seek in this temptation is its remedy, for which five things are required, to be practiced as occasion may call for them.

First, the most fitting and immediate remedy must be selected and used first.

Now the most fitting and immediate remedy is to bring the troubled person to the personal exercises of faith and repentance, by and in himself. For this end, he must examine his conscience very strictly and carefully regarding all the sins of his heart and life. Second, he must humbly confess against himself all his known sins, and at the same time acknowledge the condemnation he deserves for them. Third, he must cry to heaven for mercy, pleading with the Lord most urgently for pardon and for the restraint of the wrath due to him for his sin. David, in this distress, performed all these duties, as we may read in Psalm 6. He also says of himself that while he concealed his sins, the hand of God lay heavy on him — but when he earnestly confessed and prayed, he received mercy. And if we read the book of Job, we will find that its central aim is to show us that Job was thoroughly exercised with this temptation, and that in the end — having been rebuked both by his friends and by God Himself — his recovery was made through humbling himself, when he said: Behold, I am vile; and again, Now I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.

Some may ask here: what if the person cannot perform any good duty by himself, because of his distraction in soul and body? Answer: if the person can but sigh and sob to God for mercy and comfort, it is without doubt a work of God's Spirit and a practice of both faith and repentance. We do not know what to pray for as we ought, says Paul — namely, in our distresses — but the Spirit

Himself intercedes for us with groanings that cannot be expressed. In this lies our comfort. Thus Moses, at the Red Sea, being in great distress and not knowing what to say or do, sighed and groaned inwardly in his soul to the Lord for help and protection. And his very desire stood in place of a loud cry in the ears of the Lord.

The second thing in this cure is to make trial of whether the person has any tokens of grace in him or not.

These tokens are the small beginnings of grace I described earlier. For example: grief that we cannot grieve for sin as we should; a serious will and desire to believe and repent; a purpose to sin no more; and similar things. If these are found in the person, then by them as by sure pledges, he may be assured of God's favor toward him. Wherever any of these are found, the word spoken to Paul must be pressed: My grace is sufficient for you. And with this, the distressed person must steady his mind. Indeed, we are to be content with any condition in this life, however miserable it may be, as long as we are in God's favor — even if He should lay upon us the very pains of hell until the hour of our death. So did David, who when pursued by his own son, uttered these words to God: Behold, if I do not please You, do with me what You will. And Paul had a similar mind. Being assured of God's favor, he was content — for God's glory and the salvation of the Israelites, if it had been possible — to be separated from Christ and to endure the very anguish of hell.

The third thing in this cure is to apply to the distressed person such promises of God made to afflicted people as are most broad and comforting.

For example: The Lord is near to those who have a contrite heart and will save those who are afflicted in spirit. (Psalm 34:18). Again, says our Savior Christ: I came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). He does not say to the straying sheep, but to those now in the pit, ready to drown, or in the lion's mouth, ready to be devoured. Again: The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; therefore He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor — that is, to those who are distressed in conscience and poor in spirit. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim deliverance to the captives. These and many other similar promises are to be pressed in this case, and the person must be urged to strive to believe them and to rest himself upon them, even if he loses everything else.

Fourth, the person must be brought to a serious reflection on his past life and on God's merciful dealings with him in former times, and from this he is to draw comfort for the present. For if he has previously received tokens of God's favor and love, he may now steady and settle his mind on them. The reason is plain: God's gifts are without repentance. Whom He loves once, He loves to the end — and whom He chooses, He calls, justifies, and sanctifies, and will in time glorify. David, in such affliction that he could hardly think of God, nevertheless took this course: he prayed to the Lord for comfort, communed with his own heart, and called to mind how God had previously dealt with him. From this meditation on the continuing course of God's mercy in his life, he strengthened his faith and steadied his heart in his greatest troubles.

The fifth and last thing to be done is to remove the arguments and doubts that the distressed person usually raises against himself for his own destruction. For those who are troubled in mind

are accustomed to argue against themselves, and they commonly put forward three objections.

First, when instructed how to humble themselves and trust in God's mercy, they will grant that all these things are indeed good — but insist they do not belong to them. For they neither feel nor can feel anything except the tokens of God's anger, and that they have already entered into some degree of condemnation.

This objection may be answered by informing them of the manner in which God ordinarily works in all His dealings. For He commonly works all things in His creatures through and by contraries, if we could see the full picture.

In creation, every creature had its being from nothing — something was made, not out of something, but out of nothing. After the flood, the sign of God's covenant to preserve the world from destruction by rain is the rainbow, which is in fact a natural sign of rain. When Elijah was to prove that the Lord was the only true God against the idolatrous priests of Baal, and to do so by means of a burnt offering, he poured water over the sacrifice and filled a trench with water around it — and by this contrary means the sacrifice was consumed by fire. Christ, in curing a blind man, mixed spit and clay together, which by all reason is more likely to put out eyes than to give sight to the blind. So in the work of our redemption, Christ gives life not through life but through death, and He sends people to heaven through the gates and outskirts of hell. He does not build on an old foundation, but tears down and destroys everything, so that a person may have no hope in himself at all, but that all his hope may be in God. First He kills, and then He makes alive, as Hannah says. First He wounds, and then He heals. He makes a person sow in tears, so that afterward he may reap in joy.

The person who knows that this is God's way of working must be content and satisfied with it, because in wrath God is accustomed to remember His mercy. Indeed, His mercy is never sweet to the soul's taste until it has first been seasoned with some taste of His wrath. The Passover lamb was eaten with bitter herbs, signifying that we can feel no sweetness in the blood of Christ until we first feel the sting of our own sins and corruptions.

Second, these persons commonly object against themselves: if they could feel any comfort at all, then they would steady their minds and yield to good counsel and exhortation.

To this the answer is: there is a rule of grace — gathered from the word of God and the experience of His children — that is contrary to the rule of nature and above the light of reason. It is this: in cases of affliction, we must not live by feeling, but by faith.

This rule is grounded in the Lord's word through the prophet: The righteous shall live by his faith. When we have neither sight nor sense nor any taste of God's mercy — when we apprehend only His wrath — even then we must labor to lay hold of mercy in His word and promise. Sense and feeling are not always reliable guides for this life. For the one who at present feels nothing but God's wrath and indignation may still be His dear child. This is indeed the true test of our faith: when, even above and against reason, we rely on the mercy of God in the very apprehension of His anger. So did David. Out of the depths, he says — being now deeply plunged into the anguish of a distressed conscience — I have called upon You, O Lord. And Job, in a similar situation: Lord, though You kill me, yet will I trust in You. Abraham is commended by the Holy Spirit, among other things, for believing God above hope — that is, against everything that might reasonably have been hoped for,

given the strength of natural causes. The thief on the cross, feeling nothing but misery and seeing nothing in Christ but suffering and contempt, yet believed in Christ and was saved. And Christ Himself, when forsaken by all, void of all worldly comfort, and feeling nothing but the depth of God's wrath in His agony and passion — yet by the faith of His human nature He held firm and said: My God, my God.

Third, those in distress commonly plead that their case is hopeless — that no one has ever been in such a state as they are, no one ever touched with a distress of mind like theirs.

Answer: this is false. For the Holy Spirit has given us three notable passages of Scripture — the book of Job and two psalms of David — in which the examples of Job and David, God's own dear servants, are set before us. These men were in as great distress as any person has ever been. And those who suffer now must not think they could ever endure greater pains than Christ did — who, notwithstanding, cried out on the cross in the anguish of His soul: My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?

That is enough concerning the first kind of trouble of conscience, called the divine temptation.

The second kind of distress is that which arises from outward afflictions. By afflictions I mean all manner of miseries and calamities in this life, from the least to the greatest — from the pain of a small finger to the very pangs of death.

The question is: how may the trouble of mind that arises from afflictions be remedied? To answer this question, two things are required of the distressed person: practice and meditation.

The practice is what is to be used in all distresses of mind, whatever their kind. It is a diligent examination of the conscience in regard to sin, a sincere and heartfelt confession of that sin to God, and earnest prayer to Him for its pardon. These three things, when done truly and sincerely from the heart, are an immediate remedy against this trouble and bring with them much comfort.

Manasseh, king of Judah, who had committed much wickedness, was carried captive to Babylon and put in chains. There he humbled himself, acknowledged his sins, and prayed earnestly to the Lord. The outcome was good — for God was moved by his prayer and gave him deliverance. Job, long afflicted outwardly, humbled himself in the same way and at length received comfort. Daniel humbled himself before God for his own sins and for the sins of God's people, making earnest request to God on their behalf — and even while he was in the very act of praying, the Lord sent His angel Gabriel to give him notice of deliverance. Finally, the church of God under the cross performed this same duty: Let us search and examine our ways and return to the Lord. And God in mercy heard her mourning and lamentation. From all these passages it is clear that there is no better remedy in the world for the mind distressed by outward afflictions than the practice of these duties.

The next thing beyond practice is meditation on the comforting doctrines set forth in God's word concerning afflictions. All these doctrines may be reduced to five principal and main grounds of comfort, which I will set forth in order.

The first ground is that all afflictions — from the least to the greatest — come to pass not by accident, chance, or fortune, but by the special providence of God. I explain it this way. In every partic-

ular trial and affliction, the hand of God's particular providence is present, and this in three respects.

First, because God decrees and foreordains every particular trial. Note Paul's words: those whom God has foreknown, He has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son — and what is this image? Nothing other than a conformity to Christ in afflictions in this life and in glory in the life to come. Now if God has decreed that those whom He foreknew should be conformed to His Son in these respects, then He has also decreed the afflictions themselves.

Second, God does not merely permit afflictions to occur, but He also brings them to pass and executes them as crosses, corrections, trials, and punishments. I make peace, says the Lord, and I create evil — not the evil of sin, but the evil of punishment, which is evil in our experience and feeling. For things are called evil in two ways: some are truly evil in themselves, and others are evil not in reality but in our sense, experience, and estimation. Of this latter sort are afflictions, which God is said to create. And to this end is the saying of the prophet Amos: Is there calamity in a city and the Lord has not done it?

Third, as God causes afflictions, so He orders and governs them — that is, He sets their beginning, their end, their measure or extent, and their duration. He also directs them toward their right ends: His own glory, the good of His servants, and the benefit of His church. Thus God is said to correct His people in judgment — that is, in such a way that He keeps the whole ordering of the correction in His own hands. Joseph told his brothers that when they intended evil against him by selling him to the Ishmaelites for silver, God had directed it for good. When Shimei cursed David,

David forbade his servants to interfere with him, saying: the Lord told him to curse — who then dares say to him, why have you done this? And to this end the prophet David says: I held my peace and said nothing — why? Because You, Lord, have done it (Psalm 39:9).

Here someone may say: if afflictions came only from God, that would be one thing. But often they come from people who wish us harm — so it is no wonder we are impatient. Answer: when trials come from people, God uses them as instruments to execute His judgments upon us. In this work, God is the chief agent, and they are as tools in the hands of a craftsman. And the Lord sends these things upon us through people to test our patience under the cross. Joseph, although he knew well how badly his brothers had treated him, did not look to them alone but to a higher cause — the Lord Himself, who executed His own good will through them: God, he says, directed it for good. And again: God sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation.

The second ground is the commandment of God concerning the cross and obedience to Him in it. This commandment is expressed in Luke 9:23, where we are commanded to take up our cross every day and follow Christ. Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his only son Isaac with his own hands. And to this commandment — though a great trial to him — he set himself to render obedience. In the prophecy of Micah, the church says she will bear the wrath of the Lord — that is, she will render obedience to Him in the cross, because she has sinned against Him. And Peter says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble, therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Since it is God's

commandment that we should yield obedience to Him in every affliction, we ought to be no less careful to obey it than any commandment of the moral law.

The third ground is that God will be present with His servants in their afflictions. On this ground David comforts himself, because God had promised to hear him, to be with him in trouble, and to deliver him. And in another place: though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, etc.

So that we may better understand this doctrine, we must consider what the effects or purposes of God's presence with us in affliction are — the ways He makes that presence known. There are three.

The first is to work our deliverance from the cross: Call upon Me, says the Lord, in the day of your trouble, and I will deliver you. This promise must not be understood absolutely, but with an exception: insofar as it shall be for our good. For all promises of temporal deliverance are conditional and must be understood with this limitation: subject to whatever cross or chastisement God may choose to impose. Someone may ask: but what if God will not deliver us, and leaves us in the affliction — what comfort will we then have?

Answer: in the second place, therefore, we must remember that God will temper and moderate our afflictions so that we may be able to bear them. Habakkuk prays to God on behalf of the church, that in wrath He would remember mercy. And Paul says that the Lord will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, but will with the temptation also provide a way of escape.

Third, suppose God does not moderate our afflictions, but allows them to remain upon us — not only for some period of our life, but until death itself. Even then He will make known His holy presence another way: by giving the distressed person power and strength to bear the affliction. To you it is given, says Paul, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

The fourth ground of comfort in affliction is that every affliction upon God's servants has some special goodness in it (Romans 8:28). We know that all things work together for good to those who love God. In this regard, the crosses endured by God's children are so far from being harmful to their salvation that they are actually helps and furtherances of it. Now this goodness is perceived in two ways: by the fruit and effect of affliction, and by its quality and condition. In both respects, afflictions are good.

Touching the fruits of afflictions — because they are many — I will reduce them to seven principal heads.

First: afflictions cause people to see and consider their sins. Joseph's brothers for twenty years were little or not at all troubled by their wickedness in selling their brother. But when they were in affliction in Egypt, they began to consider what they had done: We truly sinned against our brother, they said, when we saw the distress of his soul as he pleaded with us, and we would not hear. That is why this trouble has come upon us. Manasseh in his time of peace gave himself to witchcraft and the worship of foreign gods. But when he was a captive in Babylon, he was brought to the sight of his sins and moved to humble himself before God for them.

Second: afflictions serve to humble people in their souls before God. The young prodigal son in the Gospel, while his portion lasted, spent freely and was troubled by nothing. But when he was pinched with hunger through his own folly, he humbled himself before his father and returned home to him. David says of himself that in his prosperity he thought he would never be moved, because the Lord in His goodness had made his mountain to stand strong. But, he says, You hid Your face, and I was troubled — then I cried to the Lord.

Third, afflictions work amendment of life. No discipline, says the author of Hebrews, seems pleasant at the time, but afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11). That is, afflictions and chastisements that seize upon God's children leave behind them a changed life — just as a needle passes through cloth and leaves the thread behind it. When we are judged, says the apostle, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we may not be condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32). And David confesses: It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes (Psalm 119:71). And the good husbandman prunes the vine so that it may bear more and better fruit (John 15).

Fourth, afflictions cause people to deny themselves and rely wholly on the mercy of God. Thus Paul received the sentence of death in himself so that he might not trust in himself, but in God who raises the dead.

Fifth, the fifth fruit is prayer. For afflictions make us cry heartily and fervently to God, to come into His presence and there to humble ourselves before Him. So the Lord says of His children that in their affliction they will seek Him earnestly (Hosea 5:15).

Sixth, the sixth fruit is patience. Affliction produces patience, patience produces experience, and so on (Romans 5:3). As if Paul is saying: because the love of God is poured into our hearts, we are patient in afflictions. Now while we patiently bear the cross, we experience the mercy and love of God toward us. And having once — in some notable deliverance — proved and tasted God's mercy, we by hope, as it were, anticipate that same favor and mercy for the future.

Seventh, the last fruit is obedience. The Holy Spirit teaches that this was the fruit even of Christ's own suffering: Though He was the Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

Next, afflictions are good in regard to their quality and condition, which is that they are tokens and pledges of our adoption when we make the best use of them. If you endure chastening, says the Holy Spirit, God deals with you as with sons (Hebrews 12:7). That is, He comes to you in the cross not as a judge and avenger, but as a kind and loving Father. The cross He imposes is, as it were, His fatherly hand by which He disciplines us. And therefore Job praises God for his affliction, saying: The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Job 1).

The fifth ground of comfort is that the distressed person has companions in the cross. First, he has Christ as his companion, because through his affliction and willingness to obey God in it, he has fellowship with Christ. Paul counts it a blessing to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and to be conformed to His death (Philippians 3:10). Second, if the afflicted person repents, Christ shares in all his crosses and counts them as His own. For this reason the apostle would have no one think it strange to be in the fiery

trial, but rather to rejoice because he is a partaker of Christ's sufferings (1 Peter 4:13). And Christ says to Saul, who was persecuting His church: Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me? Third, the one who is afflicted has other servants of God sharing in all his afflictions. The apostle Peter urges the church of God to resist Satan by faith, knowing, he says, that the same afflictions are being accomplished in your brethren throughout the world (1 Peter 5:9).

That is enough in general about afflictions and the comfort found in them. It would be long and tedious to set everything down in particular, together with their proper and distinct comforts. I will therefore pass over the rest and speak only of three kinds of afflictions with their remedies.

The first is the deferring of deliverance — a great affliction when considered carefully. Concerning it, I set forth one question: how may the mind of the distressed person be steadied when the Lord defers deliverance?

For the answer, three special points are to be considered.

First, God in His wisdom has determined certain and unchangeable times for the accomplishment and completion of all that exists. There is an appointed time for everything under the sun (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Solomon's statement is general, and its meaning is this: whatever there is in the world — whether done, suffered, or enjoyed by people, whether natural things or things voluntarily undertaken or necessarily endured — God in His providence has assigned each of these a set time and season on which their outcome depends. This time God most freely orders and rules at His own good pleasure. No one can hinder or delay it, nor is it within anyone's power to hasten or prevent it.

The Holy Spirit proves this in Scripture by two instances: the fulfillment of God's threats and the fulfillment of His promises, both of which God accomplishes at certain and unchangeable times. When the old world in the days of Noah had grown to great impiety and wickedness, the Lord appointed a certain period of 120 years for their repentance and conversion, at the very end and term of which He brought the flood upon them — and not before (Genesis 6). For if we compare the specific details of time noted in Genesis 7 with what Peter writes (1 Peter 3:20), we will find that the flood came upon the earth at the very moment previously determined. Again, God threatened through Jeremiah that the Jews, because of their sins, would be led captive and serve the king of Babylon for 70 years (Jeremiah 25:12). If we calculate the time precisely, it will appear that as soon as those years were expired, the threat was fulfilled. And therefore Daniel, alluding to Jeremiah's prophecy, marks it exactly when he says: That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain — that is, the very night on which those 70 years came to their full end.

And just as God has set times for the execution of His threats, so also has He determined the fulfillment of every one of His promises. We have an example of this with the Israelites. The Lord told Abraham that they would be in affliction in a foreign land for 430 years, and then be delivered. This promise of God was precisely fulfilled, as we can read in Exodus (Exodus 12:41). Before the end of those years, they had no deliverance at all. But when that time was expired, on that very same day, all the hosts of Israel departed from the land of Egypt. And although Moses, forty years before this time, took up the work of their deliverance, he did so without success. Due to a certain incident, he was himself forced to

flee into Midian, where he lived as a stranger with his father-in-law Jethro, until the full 430 years were accomplished. Only toward the end of this period, when called by God to the office, did he prosper — not before. And in the same manner, God has set down a certain period of time within which He will more or less try His children, and at the end of which — and not before — He will relieve and comfort them again.

Now just as the certainty of God's threats serves to terrify all wicked people from sin, so the unchangeable fulfillment of His promises at exactly the appointed time teaches God's children several things.

First, when they are in any distress and do not receive speedy deliverance as they desire, they should wait on the Lord's timing and expect with patience until the time He has appointed for their ease and relief arrives. In the meantime, they should steady their hearts by hope and trust in His mercy. The reason is plain. God is faithful to His word, therefore though heaviness may endure for a night, joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

The Lord comforts the Jews in a particular distress in this way, as we read in the prophecy of Habakkuk. The prophet, speaking on behalf of the Jews, complains and reasons with God about why His own people should be so lamentably afflicted by a terrible and fierce nation, and why they should be led away as captives by the Chaldeans, the enemies of God. The Lord answers that just as He had certainly determined that judgment to come upon them, so certainly had He appointed a set time for their deliverance (Habakkuk 2:2-3). In the meantime, He bids them to comfort themselves in this: that though the affliction would rest upon them

for a season, they would undoubtedly be eased in the end. Therefore they should wait patiently for the vision — that is, for the fulfillment of the vision regarding their deliverance.

Second, from this we learn that we must not only believe God's promises in general — that God is faithful and true in them, and able and willing to fulfill them as He made them — but also in particular. That is, with application to their proper and specific circumstances: the particular means, places, and times whereby and wherein He has given His word regarding our freedom and relief from the cross. Take the example of the prophet Daniel, who knew through the spirit of prophecy that the Lord had determined to bring upon the Jews 70 years of captivity in Babylon (Daniel 9). He also knew that God had promised to end that captivity at the expiration of those years (Daniel 9:2). What did Daniel do in this case? During that time, while God had not yet determined deliverance, he did not pray to the Lord for his people's freedom. But when he understood that the time was drawing near at which it was God's will for the Jews to return from captivity, then he applied God's promise to that particular time by faith — and besought the Lord with prayer and supplications, with fasting, in sackcloth and ashes. And the Lord heard his prayers and gave him a gracious answer.

The second point is that when God defers deliverance, He does so for great and weighty reasons best known to Himself.

The first of these reasons is that He might thoroughly humble people and bring them to an utter denial of themselves — and consequently cause them to learn patience in affliction, which they would not learn if they were free to choose for themselves and obtain speedy deliverance according to their own will and pleasure.

Second, so that in being afflicted, they may acknowledge from where their deliverance comes — and indeed from where they receive not only that, but every other good benefit they enjoy. Not from themselves or any creature, but only from the Lord. And thus they may learn to value and prize His gifts at their true and deserved worth. For it is a true saying, often verified in affliction and want, that blessings easily obtained are lightly regarded and quickly forgotten.

Third, by the continuation of the cross without relief, God may cause them to lose their taste for the world, and consequently draw them to the meditation of the life to come, in which all mourning will cease and all tears will be wiped from their eyes (Revelation 21:4).

Fourth, the Lord defers deliverance from affliction to prevent greater evils and dangers into which those who are afflicted might fall, if they had what they desired and were eased not according to His will but according to their own wishes. When the children of Israel came into Canaan, they were told they would dwell alongside the Canaanites. Moses gives a reason for this: Lest the wild animals of the field multiply against you (Exodus 23:28; Deuteronomy 7:22). To prevent this evil, the Israelites had to endure some trouble from the Canaanites. In the same way, the Lord keeps His servants under the cross to prevent greater sins and offenses. This should steady the minds of people and make them content to wait on God for deliverance when they are afflicted.

The third and final point is that God always has exercised — and continues to exercise — His best servants with long and continued crosses. Abraham had no children until he was 70 years old, and only then did the Lord promise him offspring. But even that

promise was not fulfilled until long after, when he was a hundred years old. David received a promise that he would be king of Jerusalem and Judah, yet the Lord tried him with many grievous afflictions before he came to the throne — so much so that he says of himself that his eyes failed from waiting upon his God. Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed to God for children, both in their youth and for many years afterward, but the Lord did not grant their request until they were old.

Without adding more examples, these are enough to show how the Lord deals even with holy men and women — His own dear servants. He does not always grant their requests or yield to their desires immediately, but holds them off and withholds His grace and favor for a time. Therefore, if it pleases Him to deal with any of us in this way, we must learn from these examples to possess our souls with patience, resting content in His will and waiting on His good pleasure to the end.

To conclude this point. Suppose that the condition of God's servants is such that they find no end to their afflictions — that those afflictions continue even to death. What should they do in this case?

Answer. Beyond what has already been said, I answer further that first, they must still — even to death — live by faith, and say with holy Job: Lord, though You kill me, yet will I trust in You.

Second, they must sustain and comfort their souls in the meantime with these and similar meditations.

First. It is the will and pleasure of God that we should enter the kingdom of God through many afflictions (Acts 14:22). Now it is the mark of a true child of God to rest content in his Father's good

will and pleasure, even when he is afflicted (Proverbs 3:11). My son — do not be grieved at my correction; that is, do not let it weary you, but be content to bear it. Our duty, therefore, is to submit ourselves humbly to the hand of God, as a child submits to the correction of his father.

Second. Though afflictions may be long and wearisome, God will in the end give a joyful and comforting outcome. He has promised this Himself: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matthew 5:4). Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord will deliver him out of them all (Psalm 34:19). Mark the blameless man and observe the upright, for the end of that man is peace.

Third. However heavy afflictions may be — however long they last — they are in no way comparable to the eternal joys God has prepared for those who love Him. This was Paul's own meditation as he endured the cross to his dying day. Our light affliction, he says, which is but for a moment, produces for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. Elsewhere he declares that he did not count the sufferings of this present time worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to God's children (Romans 8:18). Peter tells his readers that because of their assured hope of eternal life, they should rejoice, even though now for a season they are in heaviness through various trials (1 Peter 1:6). Finally, the author of Hebrews comforts the church with this reason: that in yet a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay.

Fourth. Though God withholds His hand of deliverance even to death, His love is constant and unchangeable. The cross we bear cannot separate us from the love with which He has loved us in

Jesus Christ (Romans 8:35). And that is enough concerning the first particular distress of mind.

The second kind of affliction is bodily and temporal death, which consists in the separation of the soul from the body. Regarding this affliction, the question is: how may any servant of God be able to endure the pangs of death with comfort?

To answer this, two things are required: preparation for death, and helps at the time of death. Concerning preparation, there are three duties to be performed.

The first and most important is commended to us in the book of Psalms, where David prays: Lord, make me to know my end and the measure of my days. And Moses likewise: Lord, teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart to wisdom. These passages point to a vital duty of preparation: a man should resolve himself to the reality of death continually, and reckon his days in advance. This is done by treating every day as if it were the day of his death — always doing what he would do if he were now about to breathe his last.

Second, in the way of preparation, we must strive to disarm and weaken death, which is like an armed man with weapons ready to destroy us. In this matter, we must deal with death as the Philistines dealt with Samson. They saw from experience that he was a mighty man who had defeated them many times by his power and strength, so they worked to discover where his strength lay. After searching, they found it was in the hair of his head, and they never rested until they had stripped him of it. Without question, the time will come when we must all encounter this strong and powerful Samson — Death. In the meantime, it is wisdom to

inquire where his power lies. When we search, we find that his weapons are our many sins and corruptions, both of heart and life. For as Paul says, the sting of death is sin. Therefore, to strip death of his weapons, we must practice two duties.

First, use every means to cut off the lock of our sins — the only thing by which Satan gains the advantage over us. Those means are prayer and true repentance. We must therefore be persistent in prayer for the pardon of our past and present sins, and give the Lord no rest until we have received in our consciences the sweet assurance of His favor and mercy in Christ — so that our minds may be steadied and comforted.

Having done this, we must turn to God, be careful to leave sin, and cultivate in our hearts a firm purpose and intention to walk in new obedience — conforming to the will and commandments of God in all things. This is the only way in the world to strip our enemy of his armor, to pull the sting from the mouth of this serpent, and consequently to prevail against him even in death.

Third, in the way of preparation, our duty is — even now, while we live in this world — to strive to have some true taste of everlasting life and the joys of heaven. Serious reflection on these things will be of great use. It will stir up in our hearts a desire and love for perfect happiness in heaven — indeed, a fervent expectation of Christ's coming to judgment. It will further cause us to say with Simeon: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace. And with the apostle: I desire to depart and be with Christ.

Regarding this spiritual joy and comfort in the Holy Spirit, two questions of conscience arise. First, how may we in this life have and nourish in our hearts a true taste of eternal happiness and of

the joys of the world to come?

Answer. First, by seriously considering the evils that hinder or damage our happiness. There are four main ones.

The first is the misery of our lives because of sin and its consequences. There is no person in the world, however righteous, who can truly say: I am clean from my sin (Proverbs 20:9). Even the regenerate — those who have received grace to believe, to turn to God, and to live according to the Spirit — find by experience corruption and rebellion in their minds, wills, and affections. This daily produces occasions for sinning against God and at the same time hinders and quenches all the good promptings of the Spirit within them. Furthermore, such is the relentless malice of Satan that he takes advantage of human corruption and never misses a time or opportunity to entrap the children of God in the snares of his temptations. As a result, a person — because of his own corruption and the wicked suggestions of the devil — is in constant inner conflict. He has daily occasions for sorrow, works out his salvation with fear and trembling, and wades, as it were, through a sea of many miseries for as long as he lives.

The second evil is the vanity of all things in the world. Whether we consider the world itself or the things in it — done, suffered, or enjoyed — there is nothing so solid and stable that a person, having attained it, can rest fully satisfied and content. Everything in the end proves to be empty vanity. This truth is confirmed by the experience of Solomon himself, who as king over Israel lacked neither the authority, the ability, nor the opportunity to examine and test all worldly things in every state and condition. Having pur-

posefully, carefully, and earnestly searched into them all, he concludes that the outcome of everything was unprofitable vanity and vexation of mind — as we may read in his Ecclesiastes.

The third evil is the changeable condition of our life in this world, by which we are always in a fleeting and temporary state. For we are — as Peter says — but strangers and pilgrims, wandering to and fro on the earth as in a foreign country, always pressing forward toward our own home. We have no lasting city here. The houses where we dwell are but inns in which we lodge for a time. Indeed, the very bodies we have are but tents and tabernacles, always ready to be moved, and we ourselves to be translated to another place.

Fourth, we must remember that Christ our Head is now in heaven while we His members are on earth. During our earthly life, we are separated in presence from our Head — and consequently from the happy and glorious fellowship we will one day enjoy with Him and all the saints who are fellow members in the kingdom of heaven. Paul notes this when he says: while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. And he himself therefore desired to depart and be with Christ.

Having entered into serious consideration of these evils, we must in the second place exercise ourselves in frequent meditation on the blessed state of God's chosen in the kingdom of glory. Having been taken out of this life into Abraham's embrace, they are fully and perfectly freed from sin, from Satan, from vanity and misery. All tears have been wiped from their eyes. They behold the face of God, are made like Christ in holiness and honor, and with Him inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

In the third place, having thoroughly considered these things, we must compare the state of this present life — in the ways just described — with the state of the life to come in the kingdom of heaven. Setting them side by side, we will find that the one infinitely surpasses the other in true joy and comfort. This will cause us, though living in the world, to use it as if we did not use it — to have our minds set on heaven, to think with Paul that to depart and be with Christ is by far the best for us, to have a true and living taste of the joys of the world to come, and accordingly — with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — to look for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Second, it is asked: how can a person truly discern whether this joy of the Spirit is in him or not? To answer this, it must be remembered that there are several properties by which spiritual joy differs from worldly joy. There are five main ones.

First, this joy is born, as it were, out of sorrow for sin and for the lack of Christ. You will sorrow, says our Savior Christ to His disciples — meaning for His departure — but your sorrow will be turned into joy. These words are not meant only for His disciples, but for all believers who, upon considering their sins and their spiritual need for Christ Jesus, mourn and grieve. For not only the disciples, but all true believers, are there contrasted with the world. Again: Blessed are those who mourn — that is, those who are touched with great causes for grief and who also mourn for their sins — for they shall be comforted. On the other hand, worldly joy has its beginning in the flesh and arises from things that please the flesh — and so it ends in sorrow and heaviness. In the end, rejoicing is turned into mourning, says Solomon. And: Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall weep.

Second, the joy of the Spirit is a fruit of righteousness. It flows from Christ, who is known and believed to be made for us by God — wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and full redemption. From this follows peace of conscience, and from peace comes joy in the Holy Spirit. By contrast, the joy of the flesh arises only from the sudden feeling of some worldly pleasure and therefore cannot bring any lasting peace to the conscience of the person who possesses it.

Third, spiritual joy is grounded in the right use of the word, the sacraments, and prayer — and in the practice of Christian duties of mercy, love, justice, and so on. Worldly joy is not. For the world finds joy apart from the word and outside the practices of prayer and repentance. It stands in the practice of cruelty, malice, oppression, injustice, and all manner of wickedness. And so, having spent their days in such rejoicing, at the last moment they go down to hell.

Fourth, heavenly joy is so firmly rooted in the heart that it cannot be taken away from there. Your joy no one will take from you, says Christ. It must therefore be true and solid — indeed able to swallow up every source of grief and heaviness. Worldly joy, by contrast, is never pure but always has some bitterness mixed with its sweetness. Even in laughter, Solomon says, the heart is sorrowful. When a wicked man's face shines and his expression is pleasant, even then he is inwardly sorrowful and his mind is troubled.

Finally, the joy of the Spirit is eternal, remaining in the mind of a person not only for this life but forever in the world to come. The world's rejoicing in earthly things is not so. It is fading and deceptive, just like the things in which it is placed. It begins in corruption and ends with this present life. The examples of the two rich

men in the Gospel make this truth plain. And to the same purpose, Zophar says in the book of Job that the rejoicing of the wicked is very short and the joy of the hypocrite is but a moment.

By these five properties we can draw a true distinction between earthly and heavenly rejoicing and consequently discern which is which in our own hearts. If we perceive this joy of the Spirit — rightly received in our hearts and grounded in the right use of the word and sacraments, and also in the exercises of prayer, faith, and repentance — taking root in our souls and consciences, we will find it powerful enough to moderate and overcome even the terrors of death. And that is enough on the subject of preparation.

The helps to be used at the time of death are many. They can all be reduced to two heads: meditations and practices.

Regarding meditations, we must first consider death in two ways: as it is in its own nature, and as it is changed and qualified by the death of Christ. In its own nature, death is a curse, a forerunner of condemnation, the very gates and outskirts of hell itself. But as it is transformed by Christ, it is a blessing — a brief passage to joy, an entrance into everlasting life, a quiet sleep free from all disturbance by dreams and fears. And the grave is a resting chamber, perfumed by the death of Christ for the bodies of all the elect — from which, when they awake, they will be welcomed into the presence of God in heaven.

Second, we are to consider that there are three degrees of eternal life. The first is in this world, before we die. It begins when we start to repent and believe in Christ, and when we are assured in our consciences that God the Father is our Father, Christ our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit our Comforter. For this is eternal

life: to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. The next degree is in death itself. Death cuts off all sin, both original and actual. Death frees us from all worldly miseries. Death prepares the body to enter eternal happiness together with the soul, which is already in heaven. The last degree is when body and soul, reunited, go together into eternal and everlasting glory in heaven.

Our third meditation is that there is a mystical union between Christ and every believer — not only in regard to the soul, but also the body. Once formed, this union will never be dissolved; it is eternal. Therefore the dying, dead, decayed, and consumed body remains a member of Christ, abides within the covenant, and is and always will be a temple of the Holy Spirit. Thus Adam and Abraham, who died thousands of years ago — indeed, every true believer from them to the end of the world — will rise at the last day, bodily to glory, by the power of their union with Christ. In winter, we see most trees stripped of leaves, buds, and blossoms, so that they appear to us to be dead. Yet there is a sap in their roots that in spring will rise and revive the withered branches. Even so it is with our bodies. Though they may be corrupted, decomposed, burned, eaten by worms, or devoured by wild beasts — so that they seem utterly perished — there is, as it were, a hidden sap in them, by reason of their union with Christ. By that sap they will be raised, revived, and quickened, made like the glorious body of Christ their Head, with whom they will reign and live forever.

Third, in the way of preparation, our duty is — even now, while we live in this world — to strive to have some true taste of everlasting life and the joys of heaven. Serious reflection on these things will be of great use. It will stir up in our hearts a desire and love for perfect happiness in heaven — indeed, a fervent expectation of

Christ's coming to judgment. It will further cause us to say with Simeon: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace. And with the apostle: I desire to depart and be with Christ.

Regarding this spiritual joy and comfort in the Holy Spirit, two questions of conscience arise. First, how may we in this life have and nourish in our hearts a true taste of eternal happiness and of the joys of the world to come?

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Although the devil is so malicious an enemy of mankind that he never stops devising whatever may harm people — and is so powerful in his attempts that no person by his own strength can resist him — he still cannot put the least part of his power into action whenever, wherever, or however he wishes. The reason is that God has set certain limits and boundaries on his power that he cannot cross. There are two such limits in particular.

The first is his own nature, by which he is a creature and therefore finite. Because of this, he can neither know nor do anything that exceeds the capacity of his nature or the power and ability of a creature. For example, he cannot directly and immediately know the deep things of God unless they are revealed to him — nor the secrets of a person's heart. No one knows the things of a man except the spirit of man that is in him; even so, no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:11). Again, he cannot do what is truly and properly a miracle — whose cause is hidden and entirely unknown, and which exceeds the power and order of nature. For that belongs to God alone, who is the only one who does truly wonderful things (Psalm 77:14).

The second thing that restrains Satan's power is the will of God. Consider the sea: by its nature it would overflow the entire earth, yet it is held back and shut up within its shores — as if with doors or gates — so that it cannot break out. The Lord Himself has established His decree upon it (Job 38). In the same way, though

Satan is by nature strong and his malice is great, he can do nothing at all, nor exercise his natural power to harm any person, without the will and permission of God. Thus the evil spirit could not go out to deceive Ahab until the Lord had said to him: Go, and you will succeed (1 Kings 22:22). Thus the devil could not touch the body, children, possessions, or friends of righteous Job while he was fenced and protected by the power and providence of God. But when the Lord, with respect to Job's outward circumstances, had given him leave and said: All that he has is in your hand — then the devil exercised his power to the full. Yet he could go only as far as he was permitted, and no further (Job 1:12).

The recognition of this first point — that Satan's power is limited by God — will serve to steady the minds of those whose persons, households, or loved ones are troubled by him. From this it follows that God, who holds the devil bound as if in chains, will not allow his power to be unleashed against His own children to their destruction and ruin — but only as far as will serve their good and salvation. Furthermore, since God is their Father in Christ Jesus, they may in such affliction come to Him and call upon Him for the restraint of Satan's power and malice, and consequently for the deliverance of themselves and those they love.

A second rule is this. Such persons must have recourse to God in His word, in which He promises His presence and protection to His children in their greatest dangers. Specifically, that no evil will befall them, nor will any plague come near their dwelling (Psalm 91:10), because He will give His angels charge over them to keep them in all their ways. Again, that He will be a wall of fire around His people (Zechariah 2:5), that He will extend peace over His church like a river (Isaiah 66:12). And that there will be no sorcery

against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel (Numbers 23:23). By this means, demonic harassment and witchcraft, even when they fall upon God's children, will turn to their good rather than their harm.

Third, it must be considered that the best servants of God have in their times been troubled by the devil. In His second temptation, Christ was carried by the devil from the wilderness to a pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. The children of Job were destroyed by the devil, and Job himself was afflicted with painful sores all over his body. A certain woman — even a daughter of Abraham, that is, one who followed the faith of Abraham — was troubled with a disabling spirit for eighteen years (Luke 13:15). And the daughter of the Canaanite woman was severely tormented by a demon (Matthew 15:21-22).

Fourth, people in this situation ought to hold firmly to the promise of everlasting life and must wait on the Lord's timing — not limiting Him in respect to the time or means of deliverance. This was the practice of Job: Though He kill me, yet will I trust in Him. And of holy Abraham, who did not limit God, but was content to do with Isaac whatever the Lord willed. Though it seemed likely to deprive him of all his posterity, he still clung to the promise.

In the case of houses troubled by spirits, two things are to be kept in mind.

First, people must not gather together and stay in places where it is certainly known that the Lord has given the devil power and freedom — lest in doing so they tempt the Lord. Our Savior Christ did not go into the wilderness by His own private choice and will,

but by the direction of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:1). Paul likewise did not go to Jerusalem on his own initiative, but was moved to do so by the Spirit (Acts 20:22). These examples teach us not to put ourselves into places of obvious danger — and much less to frequent places that God has handed over to the power of Satan. This condemns the rash and headstrong thinking of those who, trusting in their own strength, place themselves in needless danger without any extraordinary calling from God or sufficient warrant from His word.

If it is asked what people should do in this case, I answer: first, they ought to flee to God in prayer and draw near to Him in their hearts — and He in mercy will draw near to them.

Second, what we do with our food and drink we should also do with the houses and places where we live. What is that? We must sanctify them for our use by the word and prayer. Noah, at God's commandment, went into the ark, lived in it, and came out again. When he came out onto the earth afterward, it is said of him that he built an altar, gave thanks to God for his deliverance, and prayed to the Lord to grant him the use of the earth as before (Genesis 8:20). Though Abraham had a promise of the land of Canaan for himself and his descendants forever, he did not leave his country toward it until the Lord commanded him. And when he arrived there, he built an altar for the worship and service of God (Genesis 12:7-8). He did the same afterward at Bethel. And many years later, Jacob offered sacrifice to God at that same Bethel when he came to live there (Genesis 13:4; Genesis 35). For this very reason, under the law a special ordinance required the first fruits of the harvest to be offered, to sanctify the rest of the grain. And that is enough regarding the second distress.

The third kind of trouble of mind is that which arises from the temptation of blasphemy — aptly called by some the foul temptation, given how vile and ugly it is. It occurs when a person is troubled in his mind with blasphemous thoughts directly against the majesty of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For example: thinking that God is not just or merciful; that He shows favoritism; that He has no knowledge of what is done here below, or at least that He does not care about it; that God cannot do this or that; that He is unfair to some people and partial to others — and so on. These and similar blasphemous thoughts are not fit to be spoken among people, for they are as horrible and abominable as any that can be conceived.

To better understand this temptation, we should consider what leads up to it and by what means it takes hold in the heart.

Sometimes it comes purely from the suggestion of the devil, who troubles the imagination even of those who are innocent in the matter and casts impure and ungodly thoughts into their hearts. Sometimes it comes upon people through an evil habit — when they willingly lend their ears to wicked and cursed speech that directly dishonors God or willfully abuses His word, His judgments, and His mercies. Upon hearing such things, they either give their tacit approval, though not expressly, or they fail to stop or resist it as much as they could. At other times, it creeps into the heart gradually, when a person begins to grow cold in God's service and to think little of the duties directly related to His worship. As a result, he gradually falls into the habit of taking God's name in vain — through frequent and groundless swearing, false swearing, cursing, and so on. By these and similar means, this foul and horrible temptation is brought into the mind of a person.

The danger of it — whether it arises from these or any other causes — is exceedingly serious, especially for those who have begun to choose the way of truth and to apply their hearts to serving God and fearing His name. It produces strange and fearful effects — including despair and a host of horrors and mental anguish. Indeed, some people have been so shaken by it that they have been moved to take their own lives, judging themselves to be nothing less than firebrands of hell.

To cure this terrible disturbance and confusion of conscience, two things must be done: an inquiry must be made into the immediate causes from which this temptation arose, and after that the remedy must be applied.

For the first. Inquiry must be made as to whether the present distress began from the person's own thoughts or from the suggestion of the devil. This is, in all likelihood, the most direct way to bring comfort to the afflicted person.

Someone may ask: how can a person tell the difference between thoughts that come from the devil and thoughts that come from himself? Answer: he can know them by several signs.

First, by the way they enter the mind. Those that come from the devil come suddenly, like lightning into a house. They are in some sense forced into the mind with violence, so that the person cannot avoid them. They return again and again — a thousand times a day — and by their constant repetition they weaken the memory, dull the senses, and exhaust and confuse the mind. These are thoughts that come from the devil, driven from the outside into the mind. If such thoughts came from the person himself, they

would not arrive with such force and speed but would rise more gradually, with less violence. And furthermore, their frequent recurrence would not produce so many fearful effects as it does.

Second, such thoughts can be recognized as coming from the devil because they go against the very light of nature, against natural knowledge, reason, and conscience. They are most wicked and devilish, attaching the most vile and monstrous things to God. By contrast, thoughts that arise from our own corrupt nature, however corrupt they may be, do not typically go against the light of nature.

The third sign is that at the first moment of conceiving them, the person is struck with an unusual fear, his body is troubled, and sickness and fainting often follow. But thoughts that people form from within themselves do not cause fear, fainting, or sickness.

Fourth, blasphemous thoughts cannot ordinarily come from the heart of anyone except those of reprobate minds. But the people who suffer this distress are honest, respectable people who at least profess the Gospel — and sometimes they are true members of Christ. It is therefore clear that these thoughts come from outside, from the devil casting them into the mind, and not from within the person himself.

Next, inquiry must be made as to whether the person approves of, loves, and welcomes these thoughts — or not. If asked, he will answer that he detests them as he detests the devil and hell itself. Even a natural person will say this, and truthfully.

After this inquiry has been made, the remedy is to be applied. The first and chief remedy belongs to teaching and instruction: the person is to be informed of his or her situation — namely, that the

blasphemous thoughts in question are not their sins but their crosses. For they are the devil's sins, and he will answer for them. They are not ours unless we welcome, receive, approve, and consent to them.

As proof of this, consider that unclean thoughts that reside in a person's mind are of two kinds: inward and outward. Inward thoughts are those that originate in the flesh and arise from the corruption of human nature, even if stirred up by the devil. These, at the very first moment of being conceived, are our sins — even if they do not stay long in our minds. They are directly forbidden by the tenth commandment. Outward thoughts are those that have an external cause or origin — such as the evil thoughts conveyed into the mind by the devil. If we take no pleasure in them and do not consent to them, they are not to be counted as our sins but as the devil's, who suggested them. This is confirmed by the example of Christ: into His mind the devil cast this blasphemous temptation, moving Him toward unbelief, greed, and idolatry. Yet these were not His sins, because His holy heart gave not the slightest approval to them but abhorred and repelled them — and therefore He remained untouched by any sin through them.

This distinction between kinds of thoughts must be kept in mind. From it follows that blasphemous thoughts, when not consented to by us, are not our sins but the devil's. Just as in a similar case: if a wicked person solicits another to treason or murder, and that person does not listen or yield, he cannot be held guilty of those crimes. Therefore people must not fear these kinds of thoughts excessively — at least if they take no pleasure in them — because although they are indeed their crosses, they are not their personal sins for which they will incur God's wrath and displea-

sure. Furthermore, they should let such thoughts pass as they come. They should not strive against them, for the more they struggle to resist them, the more entangled with them they will become.

The second thing to be used as a remedy for steadying the mind in this temptation is this: even if it were granted that the evil and blasphemous thoughts are our sins, we must remember that they can be pardoned through the mercy and goodness of God if they are heartily and sincerely repented of. Indeed, neither they nor any other sins — except the sin against the Holy Spirit — condemn the person who prays against them and is genuinely sorry for them.

It was Paul's complaint in Romans 7:19 that he did not do the good he wanted to do — speaking of the inward desire of his heart — and that he did the evil he did not want to do, referring to the corruption of his nature. Now given that he strived to do what was in keeping with God's will, that he hated and detested the opposite and fought against his corruptions — how did he comfort himself? Mark what follows in verse 20: If I do what I do not want, that is, if contrary to my general purpose I sin against God — if I am sorry for it, if I am troubled that I cannot obey God with the perfection I desire — it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. From Paul's example I conclude that if a person has evil thoughts in his mind and — as Paul did — grieves because he thereby offends God, if he abhors those thoughts and prays against them, he will not be condemned for them. They will never be charged against him. The person troubled with these thoughts may therefore, on these grounds, steady his mind and take comfort. If he will not be condemned for them, let him not fear them beyond measure.

The third point to remember is that the person must not be alone. This temptation begins and is strengthened by solitude. Those who suffer from it tend to withdraw from others and keep to themselves. For this reason, if they are prone to this distress, they should seek the company of godly friends who are right and fitting for them. Their minds should be engaged in holy meditation on the word and in singing psalms. They should be occupied in good speech and conversation. Our first parent Eve was tempted by Satan when she was apart from Adam. And our Savior Christ, when He was alone and away from company, was then assaulted in the wilderness by the devil's strong and powerful temptations.

The fourth point for the troubled person to remember is that he must repent of his evil thoughts as heartily and earnestly as he would repent of evil words and deeds. The truth is, because people commonly take as little care of their thoughts as they do, the Lord justly permits the devil to plague and torment them by conveying the most vile and damnable thoughts into their hearts. Furthermore, the person must strive to be renewed in the spirit of his mind — that is, to have his mind enlightened by the Spirit so that he may know and understand God's will in His word. After repenting of evil thoughts, there must follow watchfulness and a careful watch over all his ways — but especially over his heart, which is the source of everything. Guard your heart with all diligence, says Solomon — that is, above all things, keep careful watch over your thoughts, desires, impulses, and affections.

To guard the heart, two rules are to be observed. First, the word of God must dwell richly in it. By this means the heart is guided and directed so that it does not stray from God and His word. Our hearts are ruled and governed by the word when we

know and meditate on the commandments and promises of God. This rule is especially important. For the reason people breed and hatch evil thoughts in their hearts is precisely that their hearts are not occupied with holy meditations. This is why the heart of a person becomes easy prey for the devil — because the word of God is not lodged within it. David's practice here was excellent: he kept God's word in his heart so that he might not sin against Him.

The second rule for guarding the heart is to establish our thoughts by taking counsel. This is the wise man's advice in so many words (Proverbs 20:18). He teaches us that it is the mark of a worldly wise person, in matters of importance, not to trust his own wit alone but to follow the direction and counsel of wise and skilled people. If this is sound practice in worldly matters, it is all the more necessary in the great matters of religion and conscience, which concern the heart and soul. By the same logic, it directs us not to think or entertain so much as a single thought without guidance taken from God and His word. Your testimonies, says David, are my delight and my counselors. What benefit did he gain from taking that approach? Through the word of God, which was his constant meditation, he gained understanding; he became wiser than the ancients. It caused him to hate all paths of falsehood and kept him from turning aside from God, either to the right or to the left. This same rule must be practiced by us in the use of our senses, our speech, and our actions — and then the heart will be kept clean and free from these temptations.

Since this temptation is as dangerous and fearful as has been described, and since it falls on people so often, our duty is to make it a point of conscience to practice the rules just described continu-

ally. And that is enough concerning the third kind of distress of conscience.

The fourth distress of mind is that which arises from a person's own sins — or rather from some one particular sin that has been committed. This kind of temptation is of two kinds: either more violent and less common, or less violent and more common.

The violent distress of mind shows itself through fears and terrors of conscience, through doubts about God's mercy, and through sorrowful and fearful complaints made to others. The question is: how is this violent distress of mind — arising from a person's own sins — to be cured? Answer. For it to be cured by the blessing of God, three things must be done.

First, the particular sin that is causing this violent distress must be identified. Here we should be aware that it is common for people in such distress to conceal and cover over their sins. They will claim their trouble arises from evil thoughts, wicked affections, and the corruption of nature. But in fact, people are not usually distressed in a violent way simply on account of evil thoughts and affections. The violent distress comes from some actual and serious sin or sins that have been committed — sins that wound the conscience and cause great mental anguish. There are many such sins, which have been discussed at other points and which I will not repeat here. Only this must be remembered: that the more serious sins against the third, sixth, and seventh commandments are the chief and primary causes of violent distress — and the more secret these sins are, the greater the horror that accompanies them.

Second, once the particular sin is identified, inquiry must be made as carefully as possible — by examining signs — as to whether the distressed person has repented or not. For unless he has repented, he cannot be in a state to receive comfort. And unless he is first in a state to receive comfort, he cannot find relief in his conscience. Now if it is found that the person has repented, then care must be taken in the next step to renew that repentance specifically for the sin that was committed.

Third, having done this, comfort must be administered to moderate or remove the distress. Remember here that the comfort administered must ordinarily not come alone but be mixed and tempered with some warnings from the law — so that, being made aware of sin and of the wrath of God deserved by it, the comfort may appear all the sweeter. The administering of this comfort, in a case of this distress, should not be direct and immediate but should proceed by certain steps and degrees — except only when a person is on the point of death, in which case a more direct approach must be taken. These degrees are two.

First, the person is to be informed of the possibility of pardon — that is, that his sins are pardonable. Though they may be great and serious in themselves, they can be forgiven through the mercy of God in Christ. Now suppose the afflicted person grasps only the gravity of his sins and the wrath of God deserved by them. In this state he pushes pardon away from himself and cannot be persuaded that his sin can be forgiven. What is to be done then? Answer. In order to accomplish this first step, certain foundations must be laid down on which assurance of pardon may be built up in his heart.

The first ground for the possibility of pardon is that the mercy of God is infinite — indeed, over all His works (Psalm 145:9). The death of Christ is of infinite price, merit, and value before God. God is abundant in pardoning (Isaiah 55:7). With the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is plentiful redemption (Psalm 130:7). Christ's satisfaction is not merely a price but a counterbalancing price (1 Timothy 2:6), sufficient to satisfy for the sins of all people — even for those who have sinned against the Holy Spirit. For that sin is not unpardonable because the offense surpasses the merit of Christ, but because the person who commits it neither does nor can apply Christ's merit to himself. An ancient teacher, commenting on Cain's words — My punishment is greater than I can bear — says: You lie, Cain, for God's mercy is greater than your sins. The mercy of God was very great to Manasseh, to Solomon, and to many others, though they were great offenders.

The second ground. People of mature years, living within the church of God and knowing the doctrine of salvation, will not be condemned simply for committing sin but for remaining and continuing in sin. On this basis I say that people in distress must be grieved not so much for having committed sin as for remaining and persisting in sins already committed.

A third ground. It sometimes pleases God to leave people to themselves and to allow them to commit some sin that wounds the conscience. This is true and cannot be denied. But we must also remember that sins committed do not completely destroy grace — rather, they cause grace to shine more brightly. For God in mercy turns all things — even sin itself — to the good of those who are His. Sin therefore cannot waste or extinguish grace already received. By divine governance, it actually serves to amplify and en-

large grace, so that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more (Romans 5:20). And the Lord said to Paul in his great distress (2 Corinthians 12:9): My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. This shows that God's grace is not utterly lost but shines clearly in the time of distress.

The fourth ground is this. God's promises concerning forgiveness of sins and eternal life are, in respect of believers, general and with regard to all people indefinite — that is, they do not exclude or make exceptions for any person, any sinner, or any point in time. The only exception they admit is that of final impenitence. A question may be raised here: how long should the person who ministers comfort remain on the possibility of pardon? I answer: until he has brought the distressed person to some measure of true repentance. Once this is done, he may proceed to the second degree of comfort.

The second degree of comfort is to show that the sin or sins of the distressed person have indeed been pardoned. But it may be asked: on what signs may this comfort be applied? I answer: on these two. First, if the distressed person confesses that he or she is heartily grieved for having offended so loving and so merciful a God by their sin or sins. Second, if they profess that with all their heart they desire to be reconciled to God in Christ — and that they at least desire to repent of their sins. And that they carry in their heart a purpose to sin no more, but in all things — as much as in them lies — to perform new obedience to God. Now to better enforce this comfort, some Scripture passages fitting this purpose should be brought forward — for example: I did not come to call the righteous — that is, those who consider themselves righteous — but sinners, that is, those who are grieved because in their own

conscience they are vile and serious offenders, to repentance (Matthew 9:12-13). Again: Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).

To conclude this point, there remains one further question to be addressed. A person, after repenting of some serious sin, falls back into it again and is in greater distress than before. This is a troubling case. We know that if a person recovers from a fever and then — through poor diet or other disorder — relapses into it again, his condition is often precarious and he barely escapes with his life. In the same way, it is a dangerous situation when, after repentance, a person relapses into the same sin again. The question is: how may such a person be restored after a relapse?

I answer: though we do not find in Scripture any single specific example of a person restored after a relapse, there is nonetheless some comfort for such people. On what grounds? Answer. People who have not even a drop of mercy compared to God must forgive their brothers often and many times — indeed, as our Savior Christ says to Peter, up to seventy times seven, if they return and say they repent. Now God is infinite in all His attributes. He is abundant in pardoning; with Him is plentiful redemption. Therefore He will undoubtedly, upon true repentance, often forgive and forget the same sin repeated again and again. Now such people are to be relieved in this way. First, their consciences must be settled on this point: that their relapse is pardonable, though very dangerous. As proof of this, read Isaiah 2:18, where mention is made of various backsliders whom God called to repentance with a promise of pardon if they returned to Him. In Luke 15, the prodigal son — whom I understand to represent someone who, after receiving grace, fell away from repentance and obedience to God — when he only pur-

posed in his heart to return, was pardoned and received back into favor. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul says to the Corinthians who had fallen away: We plead with you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Second, once settled in conscience on this point, they must repent again of their sins.

Third and finally, they are to be comforted with the promise of forgiveness of sins, after some signs of renewed repentance for past sins have been given.

The second temptation or trouble of mind — more common and less violent — falls upon the children of God. It is a grief of heart, more or less, by which people are troubled on account of the lack of grace in their hearts and defects of obedience in their lives. Paul, the dear servant of God, was afflicted with this trouble of mind, as we may read in Romans 7. And in truth there is no child of God who does not at some time feel, more or less, the stings of sin and the blows of Satan, which cause grief in his heart. But this grief is a notable grace of God, and therefore those who lack it must strive to have it, while those who have it must not try to suppress it but to keep it in measure and order.

The grounds of comfort by which the heart may be steadied in this sorrow — so that it does not become excessive — may be these.

First. Ground. It is God's will that the work of sanctification and regeneration should be imperfect in this life and remain unfinished until death. This needs no proof, for it is evident both from God's word and from daily experience. The reasons why God wills it to be so may be these.

First of all, God gives grace according to the capacity and manner in which we receive it — and in this life that capacity is imperfect. Some of God's gifts in Christ, bestowed on His servants — such as forgiveness of sins through His death and justification through His obedience — are not put within us but are only applied and made ours by imputation. Other gifts are infused and placed within us, such as sanctification, regeneration, and the love of God and neighbor. All of God's gifts in Christ are made ours by one of these two means — either by imputation or infusion. Yet before we can have them, we must receive them. The means by which we receive them is faith, which God has appointed to be the hand of our souls to take hold of His benefits bestowed on us. Because faith is weak and imperfect in this life, the gifts we receive through it are also imperfect. For though God's benefits are like a bottomless sea, the faith by which we lay hold of them is like a vessel with a narrow neck. Though it is plunged into the great ocean, it receives only a little water at a time — and that by degrees, drop by drop, according to the width of its opening. Hence it is that, although the gifts of God outside us — which are ours by imputation — are perfect, all graces that are placed within us are weak and imperfect.

Second, if any servant of God were perfectly regenerate and made absolutely holy in this life, he would then fulfill the moral law and so become a savior to himself. He would have life by the terms of the law, and so Christ would not properly be a savior at all — only an instrument to prepare us to keep the law by which we might save ourselves. But there is one all-sufficient Savior — Christ Jesus — and the beginning, the progress, and the completion of our salvation must be ascribed to Him alone.

Third, it is God's will that His own children — with whom He is well pleased in Christ — should be brought to nothing in themselves, so that they might find their all outside themselves in Christ. They are to be emptied, as it were, of self-love and all confidence in their own goodness. But if sanctification were perfect from the start, a person would not go outside himself but would remain as he is, resting content in his own goodness. For this reason Paul, following his time of exaltation, was buffeted by Satan's temptations — so that he might not be lifted up beyond measure (2 Corinthians 12), but would be content with this: that he was in the love and favor of God in Christ.

The second ground is this: consider what makes a person who professes Christ accepted by God, and what part that person must play for this to happen. The substance of everything we must do in order to become children of God may be reduced to three heads.

First of all, we must heartily lament our sinful lives up to this point and seriously humble ourselves on account of our sins, both of heart and of life. And if we happen to fall into any sin, we must not remain in it but recover our former standing through speedy repentance.

Second, in light of the sinfulness of our hearts and lives in times past, we must rest ourselves on God's mercy alone, fleeing to the throne of mercy for the pardon of them all.

Third, we must endeavor in the course of our lives afterward to perform obedience to God in all His commandments — so that we may thereby show ourselves thankful to Him for His mercy.

Consider the examples of this practice in God's children. All that David — that worthy servant of God — could do after his sins were committed to bring himself back into favor with God, whom he had offended, consisted of precisely these same three things: repentance, confidence and trust in God's mercy, and the practice of new obedience. This pattern is seen throughout his life, most clearly in Psalm 119 and in all the psalms commonly called the penitential psalms. Again, the prophet Daniel was accepted by God precisely for doing these things (Daniel 9). And in the same manner were Paul and the rest of the apostles.

Yet here a serious difficulty remains. Many a good servant of God may — and truly does — say: I lament my sins, and in some measure I rest on God's mercy, and I endeavor to perform new obedience. But alas — here is my grief: I cannot do these things as I would. In the matter of sorrow and grief, I am troubled by hardness of heart. In occasions that call for boldness and confidence, I am troubled by doubt. In my endeavor to obey, by many sins and various faults. To steady and moderate this grief, these further rules may be remembered.

The first rule. If there is in the mind a purpose not to sin, in the will a desire to please God, and in the whole person an endeavor to carry out the purpose of the mind and the desire of the will — mark what follows: God in mercy accepts the purpose and the will to obey as obedience itself, even though a person fails in the actual doing of it and does not perform it as well as he should. This is a great mercy of God, and we can never be sufficiently thankful for it. Yet so that we do not deceive ourselves with empty notions and bless ourselves in vain, we must know that God does not always accept the will for the deed unless there is a constant purpose in the

heart, a true desire in the will, and some corresponding effort in the life. God spares those who fear Him as a father spares his own child (Malachi 3:17). How so? Even when a child, given some task, goes about it very clumsily so that it is done poorly, the father accepts it as well done if he sees that the child is yielding to his command and doing his best to the full extent of his ability. God will deal in just the same way with those who are His children.

But how, some will ask, can God accept a work of ours that is imperfect? Answer: insofar as obedience is done in sincerity, God accepts it — because it is His own work in us. And insofar as it is ours, He pardons it, because we are in Christ.

A second rule is set down in Romans 7:19, where Paul says in effect: the good I want to do I do not do, and the evil I do not want to do, that I do. These words describe the condition of all regenerate people in this life. The meaning is this: the good things God has commanded, I do — but not as I would. And the evil things forbidden, I avoid — but not as I would. We will see this is true by comparing the voices of three kinds of people. The unregenerate person says: I do not do what is good, nor will I. And what is evil, I do — and will do it. By contrast, the glorified person in heaven says: What is good I do and will do it. And what is evil I do not do, nor will I. The regenerate person stands in the middle between them both, saying: The good things commanded I do, but not as I would. The evil things forbidden I avoid, but not as I would.

This is the condition of God's child in this life. In this respect, he is like a sick man who loves his health and therefore observes both his diet and his medicine — yet often relapses into his illness again, however carefully he follows the doctor's instructions, due to the disorder of his body. And so he must go back to the doctor a

second time for new advice. In the same way, God's children do have in their hearts a care to please and obey God. But because of the sin that dwells within them, they fail often — and so must humble themselves before Him again through renewed repentance. Again, God's servants are like a man who has been suddenly thrown into the sea and is struggling to save himself from drowning. He puts all his strength into swimming to shore. When he has nearly reached it, a wave strikes him and drives him clean back again — perhaps a mile or more. The hope and joy he felt at the prospect of escape are severely diminished. Yet he turns back and keeps striving toward shore, and never rests until he reaches it.

Third. Ground. The person who is truly regenerate has this privilege: the corruption of his nature is not properly part of him and does not belong to his person in terms of divine imputation. Paul says of himself in Romans 7:17: It is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. In these words he distinguishes between his own person and the sin that is in him. For in the regenerate person there are three things: the body, the soul, and the restored gift of God's image. Now the corruption of nature is in his person and may in that sense be called his — but it does not belong to the regenerate person in the full sense. It is not counted as his, because it is not imputed to him. And so it is, as it were, as though it were not in him. The apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 prays for the Thessalonians that God would sanctify them entirely and preserve their whole spirit, soul, and body. From this passage, among others, this understanding may be drawn: the apostle, speaking of regenerate and sanctified people, recognizes three parts in them — body, soul, and spirit. By spirit he means not the conscience but the gift of regeneration and sanctification present in the whole per-

son — body and soul — set in contrast to the flesh, which in the natural person is what is called the old man (Romans 7). Paul's prayer on behalf of the Thessalonians teaches us in effect this: though corruption remains in the regenerate person even after regeneration, God in His acceptance counts that person as righteous and keeps him so. His sin — through the mercy of God in Christ — is not imputed to him for condemnation. And that is enough on that point.

These grounds of comfort — and others like them — may serve to sustain and uphold the hearts of God's children when they are weighed down and troubled as they consider their condition in this life, which cannot until death be fully freed from much weakness and many imperfections.

The fifth and final kind of temptation or trouble of mind arises from a person's own body.

Before I address this, one question must first be answered: how should or how can the body trouble the mind, given that the soul or mind is not physical but spiritual? It seems contrary to reason that something physical should alter or disturb a spirit. To answer this, the following points must be considered.

First, all of a person's actions proceed from one single source — the soul — and are performed by its power. The body by itself is not an agent in any work, but is rather a dead instrument through which the soul produces all its actions and effects.

Second, most of the soul's operations are carried out through the body and its parts — and through the vital spirits seated in the body — as instruments. Some actions of the soul and mind are performed without the help of the body, but I say that most of them

are performed through the body and the spirits contained in it. Yet these spirits in themselves are not agents at all. The only agent in any work is the soul itself. For example: the use of the outward senses — sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell — as well as the inward ones, such as imagination and memory, are all performed through the brain and the parts of the brain as the proper instruments. All affections, both good and bad, are acted by the soul — but they arise from the heart as their seat. In the same way, the power of nourishment comes from the liver as the instrument through which the soul nourishes the body.

The body affects the soul and mind in this way: body and soul are so joined together that they form one person. Therefore, when the body is troubled, the soul is also troubled — though this does not happen by dividing the soul. For the soul cannot be divided. Nor does it happen by diminishing any part of the soul, but only by corrupting the actions of the mind — or more precisely, by corrupting the mind's immediate instrument.

This can be understood by a comparison. A skilled craftsman has a faulty and poor tool to work with. His skill is good and his ability is sufficient, but the instrument he works with is defective — and so he produces an imperfect result. His flawed tool does not take away his skill or his capacity to work, but it prevents him from doing as well as he otherwise could and should. In the same way, when the body is corrupted, it hinders the work of the soul. It does not remove the soul's activity or its capacity to act — but because it is a corrupt instrument, it causes the soul to bring forth a corrupt result.

Now we come to the temptation itself. The body troubles the mind in two ways: either through melancholy, or through other strange physical disturbances that sometimes come upon people — as we will see shortly. This is a very common form of trouble — indeed more common than the ones discussed before.

Regarding melancholy, several things are to be considered for our understanding and for treating the condition.

First, if it is asked what melancholy is, I answer: it is a kind of thick, dark blood, primarily in the spleen. When that blood is obstructed, it makes its way to the heart and the brain, where — partly through its corrupt substance, and especially through its contaminating quality — it harms both the heart and the brain, which are the seat and instrument of reason.

The second question is: what are the effects and operations of melancholy? Answer. They are strange and often fearful. There is no bodily humor — indeed nothing in the human body — that produces such strange effects when it becomes disordered. An ancient teacher calls it the devil's bait, because the devil, by God's just permission, enters into this humor and produces strange mental impressions. When the evil spirit came upon Saul, it so worked on him that he wanted to kill the man nearest to him. Why? Surely because God in justice withdrew His restraining spirit from Saul and permitted Satan to enter into the humor of choleric rage or melancholy — or both — and by this means drove him to attack David.

The specific effects of melancholy are of two kinds. The first effect is in the brain and head. When this humor becomes corrupted, it sends up harmful vapors and fills the instrument of reason, as it

were, with a fog — making it unfit to reason properly. From this comes the first effect: strange imaginings, conceptions, and opinions formed in the mind. These are not properly the direct work of the humor, but because the humor corrupts the instrument, and the instrument being corrupted cannot produce sound operations, it brings forth distorted ones instead.

For example. What some call beast-like melancholy is when a person believes himself to be an animal of some kind and behaves accordingly. Of this sort are those who think themselves to be wolves and behave in wolf-like ways. Thus we read in Daniel 4:30 that Nebuchadnezzar lived, behaved himself, and fed like an animal. Some say that he lost his soul and received the soul of a beast. But they are mistaken. There is no such transfer of souls between human or animal bodies. Others believe that Nebuchadnezzar was struck in the brain with this disease and, in a beast-like delusion, carried himself as an animal. This interpretation does not contradict the text, for verse 31 of that chapter says that his mind returned to him — showing that during the illness his understanding and right use of reason were lost. The same kind of thing is documented in history through various examples, even if the case of Nebuchadnezzar were not true.

Here is another example that is common and ordinary. Let a melancholy person suddenly see something frightening, and the force of his imagination immediately fixes that thing upon himself. If he sees or hears that someone has been hanged, or is possessed by a devil, it immediately comes to his mind that he must be hanged, or that he is or will be possessed. Likewise, when fearful things are described to him, his imagination immediately goes to

work and he pictures the thing happening to him already, or about to happen. And once this imagination takes hold, it produces horrible and frightening effects.

The second effect of melancholy is upon the heart. When the mind has conceived and formed fearful thoughts, the heart and the emotions respond in concert — affection follows imagination. From this arise intense horrors, fears, and despairs — yet all the while the conscience itself may be untouched and undisturbed.

Third, it may be asked whether there is any difference between a troubled conscience and melancholy, since many consider them to be the same thing. Answer. They are not the same. They differ greatly. Affliction of conscience is one thing; trouble caused by melancholy is another. They are clearly distinguished as follows. First, when the conscience is troubled, the affliction is in the conscience itself — and thus in the whole person. But in melancholy, the imagination is disturbed, not the conscience. Second, the troubled conscience has a true and certain cause for its distress — namely, the sight of sin. But melancholy causes the imagination to believe something is the case when it is not. It makes a person fear and despair over supposed and imaginary causes. Third, the person afflicted in conscience has courage in many areas. But the melancholy person fears everything — every person, every creature, indeed himself — and has no courage. He fears where there is nothing to fear. Fourth, the imaginings in the brain caused by melancholy can be cured, relieved, and resolved by physical medicine. But the distress of conscience cannot be cured by anything in the world except one thing: the blood of Christ and the assurance of God's favor.

Fourth, the way to treat melancholy is this. First, the troubled person must be brought to a willingness to be guided and directed not by his own judgment, but by the judgment of others regarding his own condition. By this he will gain much peace and relief.

Second, an examination must be made as to whether he has any beginnings of faith and repentance in him. If he lacks knowledge of his condition, then means must be used to bring him to some awareness of and sorrow for his sins — so that his melancholy sorrow may be transformed into a godly sorrow. If he lacks faith and true repentance, some good beginnings of these must be worked in his heart.

Third, once he has been brought to faith in God's mercy and an honest purpose not to sin any more, certain merciful promises of God should be set before his eyes. He must be urged to rest upon these promises and never to admit any imagination or thought that would contradict them. The promises are these and similar ones: No good thing shall be lacking to those who fear God (Psalm 34:9). No evil shall come near the godly person (Psalm 91:10). The Lord is with you, while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you (2 Chronicles 15). Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). The best way to bring such a person to peace with himself is to hold, believe, and know the truth of these promises — and to refuse to allow any contrary thought to enter his heart.

Moreover, though these promises may steady the mind, they will not remove the humor itself without further help being used. Therefore the fourth and final help is the practice of medicine,

which serves to correct and reduce the humor. By God's blessing, it is a means of restoring health and curing the disorder of the body. And that is enough on the trouble of mind caused by melancholy.

The second way in which the body troubles the mind is when it causes mental distress through strange physical disturbances. When a person begins to enter into a frenzy, even the slightest alteration in the brain immediately disturbs the mind. In this way, the trembling of the heart produces many frightening mental impressions when a person cannot identify the cause. The same effect is produced by swelling of the spleen, by disturbances in the organs, by violent convulsions, and similar conditions.

The remedy for this is as follows. First, it must still be asked whether the troubled person has true faith and repentance or not. If he does, so much the better. If he does not, the first duty is to use all means to stir up in him some godly sorrow for his sins.

Second, once this is done, means must be used to correct the false impression he has formed and to inform him of the actual physical change occurring in his body and what is truly causing it. Once this is understood, the fear or grief he has conceived will easily be calmed. For take away the false opinion and inform the judgment rightly, and the whole person will be the better for it.

Third, even if the false impression has been corrected, the physical disturbance may remain. In that case, the person must be taught that this is a correction from God — and that God does not merely permit the affliction to fall upon him, but is its very author. Therefore the person should be content and even rejoice in God's will. For every present condition, whether good or difficult, is the best condition for us, because it comes by the will of God.

And that is enough on the various kinds of distress of mind. I add one further observation: if we examine the condition of those who are troubled by any of these five temptations, we will rarely find them alone — they are usually mixed together, and especially melancholy is combined with one or more of the other temptations.

And that concludes the first set of questions, concerning man simply considered in himself.

THE END.

THANKS FOR READING



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